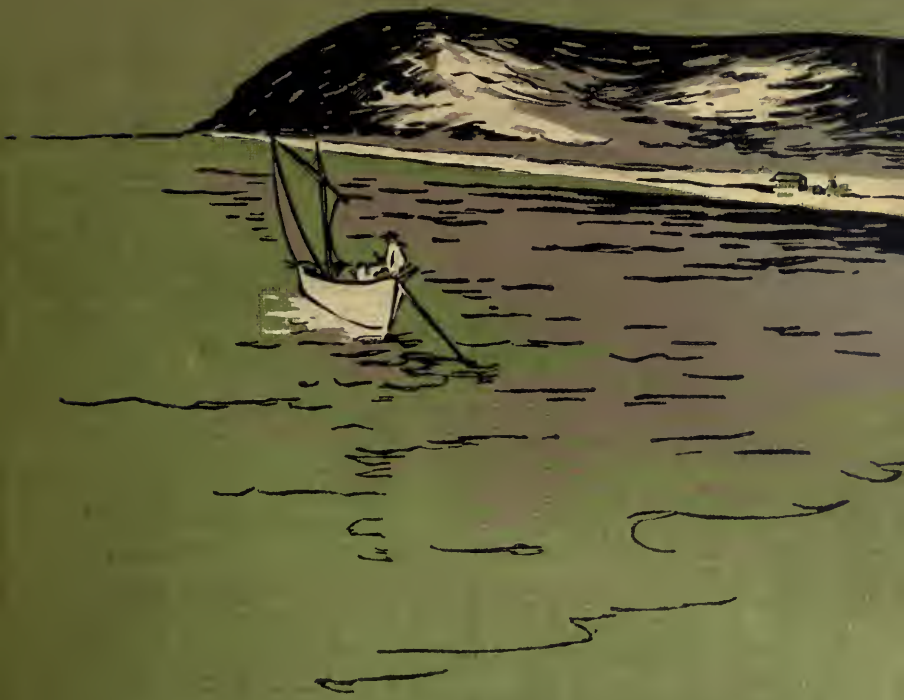

THE TRAIL OF A SOURDOUGH

LIFE IN ALASKA

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The heart of Alaska in winter

THE TRAIL OF A SOURDOUGH

Life in Alaska

BY

MAY KELLOGG SULLIVAN

Author of "A Woman Who Went to Alaska"

RICHARD G. BADGER
THE GORHAM PRESS
BOSTON

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SOURDOUGH DEFINED

While the word *Sourdough* (sour dough) is perfectly familiar to those in Alaska and along the Pacific Coast it may not be amiss to give a brief explanation to our Eastern readers.

A *Sourdough* is a miner who has spent one winter in Alaska and "has seen the ice go out." Mrs. Sullivan is a *Sourdough* herself. In all she has made seven trips to Alaska extending over a period of ten years.

When miners are beyond the pale of civilization, with a supply of flour but no baking powder, yeast or potatoes, they cut from each batch of bread dough a little piece, to be kept until it turns sour, and then used as leaven for the next baking.

It is through this custom that the miners themselves came to be called sourdoughs.

PREFACE

THIS little book is my second Brain-child. The first, entitled "A Woman Who Went to Alaska," has been so cordially received by the reading public that I have been induced to send another in its footsteps. It is with great pleasure and perfect confidence that I do this.

To my Alaskan readers it is unnecessary to state that these little tales are deduced from every day life, as they are easily recognizable. To those not yet favored by a residence in this Northland I would say that I have written each tale with a well defined purpose. With truthfulness could each one have been more vividly, yes startlingly, told; but I have no wish to unduly disturb my readers. It has been my aim, however, to picture not only character, but also the vast and wonderful gold producing region, so plainly that even the young may better know Alaska, and learn somewhat from glimpses of the trials, privations and successes of its early pioneers.

To these last Trail-blazers no *"Cheechako"* can ever do justice. Their courage, bravery, patience under difficulties, and stoicism under severe trial can never be properly appreciated except by their fellow sufferers.

My readers will find in the book much of the folklore and a touch of the mysticism so common to all people of the northland.

Counting myself one of the least among them I have been a witness to their struggles and triumphs, and for this reason I do most heartily dedicate this little book to the memory of each horny-handed pack-laden miner "musher" who has ever lifted a finger to assist, encourage, or strengthen the author of The Trail of a Sourdough.

The name of these helpers is Legion. That their cabins may be warm and roomy, winter dumps high and numerous, sluice boxes filled with nuggets, and lives long and happy, is the earnest wish of

MAY KELLOGG SULLIVAN

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	*The Miner's Reasons*	11
II	*Under the Tundra*	22
III	*The Hidden Ledge*	44
IV	*A New Klondyke*	81
V	*Estella the Eskimo*	106
VI	*Why Midas Failed*	132
VII	*The Old Stone House*	172
VIII	*A Miner's Own Story*	192
IX	*Eyllen's Water Witch*	214

ILLUSTRATIONS

Page.

The Heart of Alaska in Winter. . frontispiece

A Huskie 21

Dressed in his fresh miner's rig..... 25

A welcome shelter..... 43

The scene on shore was a repetition of that on the neighboring beach at Skagway 51

A Messenger of cheer..... 80

Panning out 105

Upon his mother's back, beneath her parkie 115

The little one clinging tightly to her hand she approached the door 121

The pretty woman was a full-blooded Eskimo.....*to face page* 138

Poling up the river..... 171

Page.

When Old Tillie was Young..... 181

She scanned the horizon..to face page 216

"Holy Mother Mary! I believe it's gold" 223

Father Peter 229

The Lord of the Northland..... 258

The cover design is a picture of Cape Nome, Alaska.

The Trail of a Sourdough

CHAPTER I

THE MINER'S REASONS

A FURIOUS blizzard was raging. Six or eight miners of various ages were huddled around the stove in a little road-house where they were likely to remain storm-bound for several days.

"Chuck some more wood into that bloomin' fire and fill up my pipe if you fellers want a yarn from me," said one, when they had besieged him for a story with which to pass the time.

"You wanted to know yesterday when I staked that claim for the woman, who and where she is, also my reasons for stakin' it; and I promised to tell you when I got the chance. One or two of you grumbled considerable at my stakin' for a person away in the States, and maybe when I have finished my story you won't feel any different; but I can't help it, and it is none of your ——— business.

The deed is done, and well done, and Rosa Nell (that ain't her name, as you can see by the initial stake if you want to dig it out from under the snow) is the half owner today of one of the handsomest quartz ledges on the whole Seward Peninsula. Walls of grey slate and trachyte, and the yellow stuff is good and plenty. Zounds, boys! I wish I had a bumper," and the speaker threw his furry cap to the ceiling.

"Never mind the bumper, pard, you know it's the last of March when no live mining camp in this country has a thing but empty bottles to bump with. Behold the size of the glass dump outside yonder if you don't believe me", remarked the keeper of the place in vindication of his house; but with sore regret in his voice.

"The story, the story! We want the story", sang out one and another by the stove, "the fire is just a whoopin' and 'twill soon be goin' out".

"Well, then, here goes," said the miner addressed. "It happened two years ago. I sold one of my Nome claims for fifteen hundred dollars with slight prospecting, (like a blasted fool that I was) and after blowin' in a good

third or more of the money concluded to buy a thousand dollar outfit and go to Norton Sound. It was late in October; the storms came on, and the upshot of it was that we were ship-wrecked off the coast and were finally put in at a small camp nearly a hundred miles from where we wanted to winter. I had taken two men with me named Long and Hartley, and though we saved, by hard fightin' in one way and another, the most of our supplies, we were without shelter, except a couple of tents, with an Arctic winter—our first in this country, upon us.

"Gee-Whilikins! Boys, it makes my black hair white to think of it! What we suffered for two months in those tents was awful; for the camp was full and there was not a vacant cabin anywhere. If there had been, you know we were absolutely without money to buy or build with. How I cursed myself for havin' foolishly spent hundreds of dollars on 'box rustlers' at the Casino,—but that is another story, boys, so we'll pass it.

"In our new camp we had many Eskimos and all kinds of people. Among others there was a little blue-eyed woman perhaps thirty years of age; maybe more—maybe less. She

was also evidently not where she had intended to be, just like ourselves, but was a teacher, left over from some stranded expedition, probably. Anyhow, there she was, and there we were. We a-livin' in the tents, and the thermometer forty degrees below zero. The teacher was stayin' with some of the Missionary folks only a quarter of a mile away, and she was all right.

"In December the dogs of the camp began to go mad. Every few days one or two had to be killed. Some men, you know, don't water their dogs once in six weeks, if at all, and as everything is froze hard in winter, the poor brutes go mad, exactly as in summer in the States, from heat.

"One night, Long and I smoked in the little road-house close by, but Hartley went to his bunk in the tent and turned in. He had not slept, but lay with closed eyes, he said, tryin' hard to get warm under his fur robe; when the tent flap was brushed aside, and in rushed a mad dog, snapping and foaming. At the first movement Hartley supposed we had returned to go to bed, but was instantly undeceived as the crazy brute made directly for him.

"Hartley threw out his hands and leaped from his bunk, seizing an axe that lay upon the floor. With that he made for the dog, and finally drove him from the tent; but only after he had been badly bitten in several places.

"The first we knew he rushed in, half dressed, where we were. He was pale with fright, covered with blood, and his eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

" 'Whiskey, for God's sake!' he pleaded, panting for breath. 'Hydrophobia, and so far from home. This is hard lines, ain't it, boys?' between gulps, the blood dripping from the hand that tremblingly held the glass.

"With that he broke down utterly and cried like a baby. We washed and dressed his wounds as best we could, and put him to bed in the road-house as it was then past midnight, while three of the boys rigged themselves in their furs and hunted the blasted brute that had done the mischief. They found him gnashing his teeth alongside an outhouse, and a good dose of cold pills settled him forever.

"Next mornin' we sent a man to the little teacher to ask for medicine for Hartley, and immediately she and another woman came

over. They brought lint bandages, carbolic acid, and other things and bathed the wounds; but, best of all, they cheered up the poor fellow by telling him that he need have no fear of hydrophobia, as the bite of the Eskimo dogs in winter does not have the same effect that the bite of other dogs has in hot weather. By the repeated visits and ministrations of the women, poor Hartley, in a few weeks, recovered.

"However, the little teacher was not satisfied. She knew we must suffer terribly in our tents, and wanted us to make other arrangements. At last she thought of a plan for us: An old log school-house, long since deserted for the new one built near by, was unused except as a store-room. This building had been originally made warm and tight by moss chinking, a heavy door, and closely caulked windows. Some of the latter were now broken, and the snow sifted in upon the dirt floor, but these things could be remedied.

"The little woman had planned it all before we knew it. She had asked and gained consent of the owners before she opened her story up to us. The baggage then in the

cabin was to be piled in one corner, the windows were to be mended as well as possible along with the chimney in the middle of the roof; and for a trifling consideration each month we were to have the use of the building. It was a god-send to three men only partly sheltered by canvas in January, latitude sixty-five; and if you don't believe me, boys, just try tents yourselves next winter, and find out.

"Did we spend the remainder of the winter in that old school-house? You bet we did. After puttin' considerable time on the old chimney, makin' some new stove-pipe and a patent damper of our own from coal-oil cans, and usin' the sides of some of the same in place of glass in the windows, we did get fixed some sort of comfortable. Anyhow, we had a house over our heads that could not blow down in a blizzard, and a solid door which kept out mad dogs at night. To be sure, when the spring rains came, the roof of turf, upon which the grass began to grow, leaked in several places; but we spread our canvas tent over it, weighted it down with stones at the corners, and got along finely.

"The gist of my story is still to come. One day along in February the little woman sent for me. She wanted to see me very particular, the messenger said. When I saw her a few minutes later her eyes were shinin' like stars in the night time. She wanted me to go with another man to stake a creek about fifteen miles to the north of us. She had heard from some source that the creek was good.

"Would I go the next day if she furnished the outfit? Of course I said, yes, and our plans were hastily laid for the next day. We had some trouble to get good dogs for the trip, and before our preparations were completed the whole camp was onto our racket and wanted to go along.

"Now, you know on such occasions, above all others, one does not want the whole country at one's heels, so we tried our best to shake them. We postponed our trip until the second day; the women in the mean-time gettin' our grub cooked. We then took the bells off our dog collars and packed our sleds behind closed doors; but it was no go. In spite of all our precautions three dog-teams followed our trail as we slipped stealthily

out of camp at mid-night. The moon shone brightly and the snow was not too deep. The boys kept at a respectful distance behind us, and we mushed along between low hills mostly up the streams on the ice.

"To make my story shorter, we staked what we wanted of the creek, and let the other fellows in on what was left. After that, without sleeping, but with a hasty meal, we put back home again as fast as our dogs would travel.

'Three months later, when the snow was about gone, and we thought the time ripe for prospectin', I took my two men and an outfit and gave that blamed old creek a fair trial. We hustled and rustled to beat the band. We shovelled, panned, built dams, and worked like beavers in water above our knees. We moved our tents further up on the bank at midnight at the risin' of the creek durin' a hard rain—but, egad! after two weeks of that sort of thing, no gold could we find. Not a color! We cursed and tore around something fierce among the Queen's English, but it did not help matters a particle.

"There was no gold there.

"When we reported to the little woman she would not believe a word of it. She did not think we had tried to find it. Perhaps we had not gone deep enough. We should have waited until midsummer when we could have done better work; and a lot of other things of like description. When I insisted that we had done the very best we possibly could, and that there was positively no gold there, she still persisted in sayin' she wanted that bunch of claims recorded. In vain I told her it was no use; the creek was no good, and to record the claims was a waste of money.

"While I talked, the little woman stood lookin' in an absent-minded way before her. When I had finished she turned toward me with considerable spirit, and almost with anger said, the tears comin' into her eyes meanwhile, 'I will never again ask you to stake a claim for me, so there!' and she ran into the next room and shut the door.

"The claims were never recorded.

"Well, boys, she kept her word, and I wish she hadn't. I would be willin' to let her pick out creeks for me forever, for, say, let me tell you, fellows," dropping his voice and taking

the pipe from between his teeth he knocked its ashes out upon the cold hearth, "that creek bed was solid stream tin; pure cassiterite, the best on the Seward Peninsula, and a whole fortune for anyone; but we did not know it.

"Next time a woman like that one tells me to do any recordin' of claims I'll do it, you bet; for somehow, I can't explain it, but there are others besides Eugene Field's kids who are good at 'seein' things at night,' and a woman can sometimes feel things that we fellows can't see in broad daylight.

"Now you have my reasons for stakin' for her yesterday. If any of you fellows want to kick at what I have done, you can just take it out in kickin'—yourselves. Our new ledge is a jim-dandy; and seein' as I cheated the woman out of her cassiterite, I'm bound to make it good in yellow gold.

"But I'm goin' to turn in now, boys, and I'll listen to you to-morrow. Good night."

CHAPTER II

UNDER THE TUNDRA

IN a little three-room cabin in Nome, a middle-aged woman, wearing glasses, knitted a gray woollen sock for her boy, as she called him.

"Yes", she said musingly, "my husband and I came here during the rush of 1900. My son, Leroy, had come the year before to pave the way for us, as he called it, and this he tried his best to do. He staked some gold claims and a town lot, and put up a one-room cabin, building on to the latter after we arrived. His idea was to get his father and me away from the farm (which he hated) and start us in mining in Alaska, he being exceedingly enthusiastic on this subject and positive that we would enjoy it as well as he did."

At the conclusion of this introduction to the story the woman laid down her knitting and pushed her glasses up to the top of her head. Then with an amused expression about the corners of her mouth, she said:

"The story of all the actual mining that Pa

Morrison and I ever did is not a long one, but it is one he would much rather I did not often relate. However, as you wish to hear it, and he is too busy at his book-keeping in the next room to know what is going on, I will tell you how we began mining in Alaska.

"We had landed safely upon the beach with all our necessary belongings, as well as feather-beds and pillows, also fruit-cake and other good things for Christmas. My son had met us with open arms and shown us with much pleasure to his tiny cabin on a nearby street. To this place all our boxes were in due time hauled by dog-team, and a big tent set up temporarily alongside the cabin.

"While unpacking articles to be immediately used we had not forgotten our mining tools, gold pan, picks and shovels, as well as rubber boots, and all were spread out in fine array in the sunshine beside the tent.

"Much of our clothing had been especially selected with a view to our new occupation, and there were dozens of new blue and brown denim jumpers and overalls, bandana handkerchiefs, woollen socks and shirts for Pa, as well as short, warm dresses and stout aprons for me.

"To enumerate all would take too long. Enough to say that in our anxiety to get to work at the real object of our coming, we rushed the adjustment of affairs in our camp through with all speed, and two days after landing at Nome, Pa and I started out to do some mining on our own hook upon our first gold claim."

Here the woman paused to take breath, and picking up her knitting to inspect it for a moment, seemed somewhat reluctant to proceed.

"Was the claim far from town?" some one asked, in order to bring her back to her narrative, and at the same time not to appear too anxious.

"Oh, no," she said, brightening considerably. "Leroy is always such a good and thoughtful fellow, and he had selected this cabin for us near the west end of town, close to the cemetery, on the tundra. It was only a short walk for us, he said, and the ground must, undoubtedly, be rich, as much gold had been taken out of the beach-diggings next the tundra where our claim was located.

"It was reported that the beach contained from one to three pay streaks before a depth of three feet was reached; that nuggets worth

"Dressed in his fresh miner's rig"

as much as twenty dollars were found in the beach-diggings, and the tundra was good pay dirt from the 'grass roots down'.

"Well, my husband and I started for the claim, as I said—we started Snake River bridge, Pa paying his ten cents toll, while I went across free as was the custom that summer, and we trudged down the road on the sandspit to the cemetery. Dressed in his fresh miner's rig, (that was an accidental pun) taken so lately from our big packing boxes, Pa marched with all the dignity a man of his height and thinness can assume, with a gold pan under one arm, and a shiny pick and shovel upon his shoulder. I followed close behind."

At this stage of the story Mrs. Morrison cast a quick glance at the door of the adjoining room where her husband was writing. Then opening a table drawer close at hand, she took out two kodak views and handed them to her listeners.

"He must not know where I keep these pictures or he would burn them as sure as fate; I have dubbed them 'before and after'."

They examined the views she handed

them. A stout, resolute looking woman with a pleased expectant countenance, short dress, huge basket on right arm. The man beside her holding his broad brimmed miner's hat in his hands, his unused gold pan, pick and shovel, at his feet. For a background a tent, a bit of the river, and bridge.

In the "After" picture the scene was changed. Dejection was depicted on both faces. Their clothing was soiled and their implements had seen usage, but were now flung upon the ground in disorder.

"A friend took these snap-shots of us," she explained, returning the photos to their places, "and Leroy likes to preserve them 'just for fun' he says.

"To go back to my story, we made our way along as best we could by inquiring (for Leroy had been obliged to go to the creeks to attend to some work in progress; so could not go with us; in fact, he did not know of our intention of sallying out upon the tundra), and finally arrived at the cemetery. We spent little time in looking at the few rude head-boards and scattered mounds of those quiet sleepers by the sea, but bestowed more attention upon the beach-miners on

our left. Here, at the edge of the water, and even standing in the surf, were many men at work, beach-mining with Long-Toms' or other contrivances, and all wore high-topped rubber boots.

"Looking about for the claim in which we were so much interested, we finally found the corner stakes, and the St. Charles cream can in which the location notice had been placed by Leroy a few months before.

"Then Pa wanted me to read the paper to him, which I did, after seating myself on a big hummock of tundra and properly adjusting my spectacles.

"The paper ran thus: 'We, the undersigned citizens of the United States, have discovered placer gold in the ground hereinafter described, and hereby claim for placer-mining purposes twenty acres on the tundra west of Nome and 100 feet north of the cemetery.' Then followed the distance between stakes, the name of the witness, our own names, and that of Leroy as our agent, the date of the location, etc.

"By this time Mr. Morrison was hungry. So after replacing the location notice on the initial stake under the old cream can, just

as we found it, we lunched heartily on ham sandwiches, doughnuts, pie and cheese. A quart bottle of coffee had added much to the weight of the basket on the way.

"We now turned our attention to the tundra. Of what was it composed? How deep was it? Was it easily handled? Would it burn? Was it wet? And how large an extent of country, or rather territory, did it cover. These were only a few of the questions that Pa Morrison now flung at me in quick succession, leaning as he did meanwhile on the handle of the shovel.

"I grew impatient.

" 'I really cannot answer your questions, Pa Morrison, and you know it; but as to the extent of the tundra I think I can safely say that it covers the whole of this gold claim and a good deal more besides, for I can see as far as the hills yonder without my glasses that it all looks alike,' and I tugged with might and main at some small trailing vines imbedded in the deep mosses.

" 'As to the depth of this tundra you have the shovel in your hands and can soon investigate if you see fit to do so', I continued as Pa still stood looking dubiously about him

without so much as making a jab with his shovel.

" 'Then there is the composition of this tundra to be studied. If I understood the flora of Alaska I would give you the desired information quick, but I don't, and I am too old to begin to study it now. I believe, however, that I can tell a gold nugget when I see it, and if you will bestir yourself and turn up a few, I will agree to analyze them to your heart's content,' giving him what was meant to be a conciliatory smile which was entirely lost because he never looked my way.

"With that he set to work. Down into the deep moss and tangled vines of the tundra he plunged that new and shining shovel with force enough to jar the teeth out of his head. This was kept up for fully ten minutes, while I rummaged around among the hummocks for the lovely many colored mosses, and mentally tried to count the different kinds of tiny plants, numbers of which were blossoming in artistic colors and profusion under our feet.

" 'Mary.'

" 'Yes, Pa.'

" 'Do you think a hole four feet square instead of six would be big enough?'

" 'O, yes, certainly. Anything, if it is only one foot square,' said I, sarcastically, for I had a consuming anxiety to get down to those nuggets which lay 'just at the grass roots' and Pa was so awfully slow.

"We had talked this matter over the day before, and had decided upon a hole six feet square.

" 'If I were in your place, Mary, I wouldn't be too smart,' said he testily, and then rested again upon the shovel handle. His face was flushed and heated. He breathed hard. Dead silence for a long minute.

" 'I wish I'd brought the axe,' said he.

" 'What for?'

" 'To cut these beastly vines and roots with.'

" 'Dear me! Shall I go home and fetch it?'

" 'No, you needn't', crossly. 'By the time you got here with it you would have to go right back to get supper. It is half past one o'clock now, and I have been at work an hour.'

" 'But you were going to work all day, weren't you?' He had scarcely made an impression on that tundra, and not a single nug-

get had we seen.

"With that he planted a few more good, hard jabs into the thicket of moss, vines and leaves, trying to get the hole four feet square anyway, after my rather uncalled for taunt about its size.

"In the meanwhile I was not wasting my time. I was using the pick upon a cluster of bunch grass hummocks, wishing to fill the gold pan with dirt from underneath that I might wash it out and see if it contained 'colors'.

"Somehow I felt more subdued like, perhaps because I was growing tired; but Pa seemed to be affected differently. I could hear him grumbling to himself, and that was a bad sign. By and by his shovel struck something hard. He uttered an oath.

" 'Pa Morrison!' I exclaimed, 'Ain't you ashamed of yourself? To think of your swearing like that. It's awful! Give me that shovel instantly.'

" 'I won't!'

" 'Give me that shovel, I say,' for we were both church members and had been for many years, and I was inexpressibly shocked at his profanity, and wished to remove the cause.

" 'Shut your head, Mary Morrison! Whose doing this mining, will you tell me?'

" 'O, of course you are, but then I wanted to help you if I could,' trying to speak quietly and coming close enough to take the instrument of dispute from his hand if he would let me.

"No reply.

" 'What did you strike, Pa, that made the shovel ring just now?'

" 'Shovel!—ring!—It was ice! bloomin', blasted, infernal ice, I tell you,' he shouted in a rage, standing in black muck almost to his knees, with the same material bespattered over him from head to foot. Indeed his red and perspiring face showed a couple of great, black smirches with which he had unknowingly beautified himself.

"He was fairly sizzling with wrath. "Git down here yourself, and go to work, and see how you like it,' he shouted excitedly, forgetting his English and everything but that we had encountered an astonishingly hard proposition, and it had gotten the best of us. Like an old clock he was wound up and could not stop.

" 'No gold, no nuggets, no grass roots

even; nothing but muck and ice!' and another mouthful of big, strong words gurgled from that man's lips like water from an uncorked jug.

" 'Don't, Mr. Morrison, don't do that,' said I, in a voice cold as the ice in that four foot hole, 'you may be heard by some one who will report you to the church trustees, and then you will be expelled. At your age it would be a positive disgrace.'

" 'Shut your mouth, I tell you,' he yelled, 'I ain't no baby! I know what I'm doing, and I know what I want to do, but it ain't mining on this confounded tundra!'

"At this I clapped my hands over my ears to shut out such language, but he kept on just the same.

" 'Did we lease our farm for a whole year with all the machinery and stock, pack up our household furniture and come three thousand miles over this water like the blooming old idiots we are, to dig in a muckhole full of ice? Did we tell our banker that he should have the very first gold we took out of the ground to pay the two hundred dollar mortgage on our town lots? Does this look much like lifting mortgages from anything?'

"As I made no reply he insisted, 'Does it, I say?'

" 'No, Pa Morrison, it doesn't,' I admitted, 'but wait a minute and let me talk.'

" 'Well, ain't you talking now?' he rejoined irritably.

"Without noticing his exasperating words or tone I said calmly:

" 'I remember hearing Leroy say when we first arrived that the tundra is a hard and peculiar proposition. Many have failed at mining it, but to those who go to work at it in the right way, at the proper time it will prove a bonanza. Now, probably you and I have not gone at it properly.'

"A surly silence ensued, during which Pa worked slowly, with anything but a good grace. Leroy was right. The tundra was a hard and peculiar proposition. Nothing like it had we ever seen before. For miles on three sides of us it spread itself like a carpet of green, dotted often with tiny pools of clear water, shining like glass in the June sunshine. Miles away to the northward rolled the smooth-topped hills, only one of them bearing a small, rocky crest; while further away, and forming a background to these, lay the snow-

tipped Sawtooth.

To the south of us and close at hand spread the wonderful waters upon whose broad and beautiful bosom we had so lately sailed, and whose gently sweeping surf was today making sweet music among the sands and pebbles on the beach.

"Many ships lay at anchor beyond. However, it was neither the scenery, nor the water, nor the ships that we were now called upon to consider; but a layer of ice, the depth of which we did not know, lying between us and the much desired golden nuggets. The ground lay level and open to the sun, with nothing to prevent its thawing except this peculiar blanket of tundra mosses, vines, and plants, which formed an insulator as perfect as if made to order. It was now the middle of June. There was no doubt but that the ice would remain as it was all summer.

"Giant powder might possibly be used, but it was dangerous and expensive. I would never allow Father to handle the stuff. Better let it all go forever. Probably Pa was right about our being foolish to come here. We could go home again as many people were doing. There lay the steamers making prepa-

rations to sail; but how our friends at home would laugh at us!

"On the other hand was it not too soon to pronounce on this tundra, and really no fair trial of the ground or mining? Then, too, our son probably had his own plans for us which must be more intelligent ones, for had he not had some experience and a year's residence in this place?

"There were the creek claims, besides. They must surely be very different and easier to work.

"Reasoning thus I had wandered away a short distance by myself in order to let Pa's temper cool, and had forgotten the planning I had started out to do.

"I now returned. Taking up the gold pan I filled it with dirt and muck from the four foot hole taken directly above the objectionable ice, and though I found its weight almost more than I could carry, and Pa did not offer to help me in the least, I carried it to a small pool of water at no great distance and began to pan it.

"How heavy it was to be sure. There might be gold in it yet. I would see presently. I had watched men panning on the

beach that morning and I believed I could do it as it appeared very easy.

"Immersing the pan in the water, after pinning my skirts carefully higher, I began the rotary motion so necessary to separate the gold from the sand and dirt. A moment of this employment and I was breathing heavily and felt very warm. I put the pan down and flung off my sun-bonnet, pulling my sleeves a notch higher before continuing. Again the rotary movement with various dips of the edge of the big pan to let the waste material pass away. Small pebbles showed themselves and had to be picked out, the heavier material sinking in the natural order of things, to the bottom.

"I was watching the outcome with great interest, though panting for breath and covered with perspiration. Suddenly the soft earth under my right foot gave way, and I found myself, gold pan and all, in the mud and water up to my knees.

"I thought of Pa and his recent profanity, but I shut my teeth resolutely together, wringing out the edges of my petticoats and pulling my rubber boot tops still higher.

"Fishing for the gold pan I brought it to

light. Of course its contents were lost, my hands and clothes were muddied and my efforts wasted; but I would not give it up yet.

"Another pan of the same material was brought and a second trial was made, with success this time as the pan was not filled so full.

"Finally, after shaking, twisting, dipping, picking out pebbles, washing off sand, and resting a moment at intervals, it was finished.

"There was gold in the pan.

"A few small 'colors', bright and shining as if made so by much scouring of beach sand, appeared in the bottom of the gold pan to gladden my longing eyes, and I hastened to show them to Pa Morrison, whose head and shoulders were still visible in that four foot hole.

" 'Humph!' said he, in much disgust, as I exhibited the result of my labors. 'Is that all?'

" 'Why, yes.'

" 'And no nuggets?'

" 'No nuggets.'

"At that he flung the pick he had been using in the ice upon the ground.

" 'I'm going home', he said shortly.

"Now I hardly knew whether he intended to say he was going to the United States, or to the little cabin and tent on Front Street, but rather than run the risk of exploding another bomb of wrath like the last one by asking a question, I kept quiet and made preparations to go back to our tent.

"On the beach we washed our hands and smoothed our clothing as best we could; but the frown which had lodged on Pa's forehead remained.

"That evening when Leroy had returned from his work and we had eaten our eight o'clock supper with the sun still shining very brightly upon the tent, the boy lighted his pipe and asked for the story of the day's doings.

"I then gave it from the beginning. When I reached Pa's discovery of the ice in the prospect hole on the tundra, Leroy laughed heartily. Then seeing the aggrieved look on his father's face, and, I suppose, a bothered one on my own, he became more serious, and drawing closer, took my hand in both of his.

" 'I never intended you to begin mining in that way, Mother,' he said, simply, in a low voice. 'I want you here to help me keep

house, to mend my clothes, to bake bread and fry griddle cakes, and do the many little things for Father and me that only you can do. In this way I can keep my health and give all my time to my mining.'

" 'I want you, Father,' he continued, laying his hand affectionately on his pa's knee, 'to do my book-keeping, reckoning the time and wages of my men at work on the claims. Accounts of assessment work on twenty claims, besides new prospecting in different localities, will give you something to do after cutting the kindling for Mother; and neither of you need feel that you are useless nor idle. Part of these gold claims are yours, and in your own names, and you can both make short 'mushing' trips of inspection over the country when you like; though the new railroad up Anvil will be finished in a few weeks, and then you can ride. Under no consideration must either of you think for one moment of buying steamer tickets back to the States inside of a year. At the end of that time we will be taking out so much gold that you will not wish to leave, I assure you. I am almost thirty years old now, Mother, and you and Father are all I have,'

he said softly, pressing my hand.

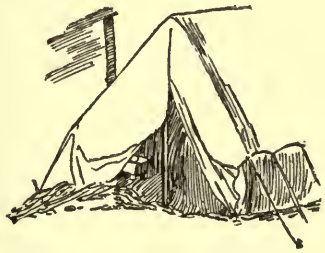
"Then I kissed his forehead and promised to stay, and I have never been sorry. Father said he would try it a year, and then see about staying longer, and here we are still in Nome after four years without once going 'outside'.

"And you like it here?" they asked.

"Very much indeed, because our ground is turning out finely, and Leroy is so good to us.

"About that tundra claim, however, nothing was ever done. Pa could never be induced to step his foot upon it again, and being so determined in the matter, we just let it drop.

"There it is yet, St. Charles cream can, stakes, and all; but the four foot hole, with its icy foundations, is nowhere to be seen, having been long ago levelled by wind and weather."



CHAPTER III

THE HIDDEN LEDGE

THE summer of 1897 was a memorable one in the great Northwest. It was then that the first authentic news of the immense richness of the Klondyke region became public. Less than a dozen persons had wintered on Bonanza and Eldorado, the famous gold creeks discovered by Carmack in September, 1896, and these reported the marvelously rich "strikes." Certain weighty moosehide sacks they carried, confirmed their stories.

Two weeks later the docks of the principal cities on the sunset coast presented a changed appearance. All was hurry and flurry. Ships being loaded to the deck rails were moored by their great hawsers alongside docks groaning under immense freight deposited upon them. The rush and clatter of drays and wagons united in one deep, deafening roar. These huge masses of freight and baggage presented the same general appearance. Everything with which to begin mining life in

a new and barren country was there. Dog sleds and fur robes, heavy army sacks crammed to their drawstrings with Mackinaw and rubber clothing, boots and shoes, boats, tents, dogs and horses, piles of lumber for boat building, coils of rope, dog harness and bales of hay, while fat yellow coated hams bulged in heaps both gay and greasy in the summer sun as though further frying were unnecessary.

There were mining tools heaped in corners or against the walls of warehouses, being stacked too high to safely keep their places if jostled ever so lightly. New and clean gold pans, one inside another, towered roofward among outfits of aspiring tradespeople of the prospective camps in the Klondyke; these same rich men in embryo being also the proprietors of the closely piled sacks of flour, meal and beans, along with hundreds of cases of butter, eggs and cream, *ad infinitum.*

Among the hurrying, excited men preparing for departure an undesirably large number were those anxiously caring for bottle-filled cases and black barrels, cumbrous and heavy enough to have been already crammed with Klondyke gold; but in reality being full

to the brim of that which (their owners prognosticated) would relieve them of using pick and shovel, and bring them without effort after their arrival in the new diggings all the shining gold they could want to handle. It concerned them little that they would give in exchange for all this wealth only that which would deplete the pockets, befuddle the brains and steal the wits of the deluded purchasers, making them in every case less able to cope with adverse conditions so desperate in this new, untried, and remote region.

These men walked, well dressed and pompous, among their goods and chattels on the great and busy wharves in the hot sunshine, mopping their perspiring brows and fat cheeks, which latter, like those of well kept porkers, adorned their rubicund faces. Across their broad waistcoats dangled glittering ropes and "charms" of tawdry composition, well suited to the ankles of a chaingang, so heavy were they; and from spotless white shirt fronts there shone jewels (?) of enormous size and cheapness.

Above the din was heard at short intervals on the steamer's deck the rattle of machinery, dropping huge, freight-laden nets or baskets

into the hold. Upon the wharves hustled blackened stevedores, flushed and panting, reeking with perspiration and tobacco juice, but straining, tugging, lifting until one could almost imagine he heard their muscles snap; resolutely and steadily laboring hour after hour, until at last, wearied beyond further endurance, they gave way to others who sprang energetically into their places.

It was little past midsummer. A large ship of the collier class, lately fitted in the roughest possible manner for carrying passengers to Alaska, lay alongside the dock in the great town of S. Hundreds of people waited on shore to catch the latest glimpse of friends about to leave them, while a round thousand of those eager to "strike it rich" in the new Klondyke swarmed over the vessel.

Of these, many, no doubt, would never return. It was a sad day, and brightened only by that hope without which the world would be undone.

Upon their arrival in the quiet little sea of Lynn three days later all hands were cheered because this indicated the end of their uncomfortable voyage; and even if new discomforts awaited them, they would, at least, be those

occurring on shore and under broad heavens, in pure, cool air, where the fetid atmosphere of ship's steerage quarters was unknown.

But alas! When the dense fog lifted, and the sun with diffidence peeped through its grey and watery veil, the sight that met the eyes of the expectant argonauts was grand but not reassuring. Mountains rose to wondrous heights above and on all sides of them, while those directly in front, and barring them from their desired route and destination in sheer contrariety loomed heaven-high, as though they would rend the azure sky with their jagged and snowy peaks. Steep and precipitous rose the sides of those giant hills directly from the water's edge except where, at the foot of the Grand Canyon, trending northward, a small tract of wet and boggy land dejectedly spread itself. Between this and the anchored vessel upon the decks of which stood the thousand would-be miners the waters of old Lynn rose and fell with an ocean's pulsing, at the same time quietly moving in their accustomed way among the beach sands and shingle. No soothing lap of the waters against the sides of the vessel consoled these unromantic men. There were no docks or wharves at Skagway.

The immense ship's cargo must be unloaded into small boats or hastily built scows to be towed ashore over the shallow waters. It was the beginning of a gigantic undertaking, and many, hearing of a more desirable landing-spot and a quicker, easier mountain pass further on, kept with the ship to Dyea. But the same low and lazily lapping waters surrounded them as at Skagway. Tides rose and fell, and, at their own will, fogs settled and lifted.

By turns rain came, winds blew, and the sun shone, the latter in a subdued and apparently reluctant manner, as in winter on the shores of old Puget.

At this stage of affairs there was no further postponement of an evil day possible, and the remaining voyagers with their freight were hustled on shore with as much expedition as was permissible with a few barges, flat-bottomed fishing boats, and Indian canoes.

With their faraway homes behind them, and the top of lowering mountains often hidden by storm-clouds before them, these hundreds of daring argonauts faced the hardships of a trail, and life in an Alaskan

mountain wilderness; their own backs and those of a few pack animals being the only means of transporting many tons of necessary supplies into the vast interior to which they journeyed.

To say that the courage of no man failed at the prospect would be untrue; but none liked to appear to his fellows to weaken, and notwithstanding the disheartening outlook, all set to work with a will until the hold of the great ship was entirely empty and her waterline had risen many feet above the ripples of Lynn.

The scene on shore was a repetition of that on the neighboring beach at Skagway, separated from it, however, by glittering peaks, the snows of which were melted daily by the sun and warm wind and found their way in streams down ravines and canyons, across glaciers and around boulders, dropping lower and still lower to the moraines near salt water.

Busy indeed was the scene now presented. Colonies of canvas tents were grouped upon the beaches close above the high water mark where the outfits of the travelers had been hastily dumped. Camp fires crackled and

The scene on shore was a repetition of that on the neighboring beach at Skagwan

Indian fishermen traded fresh salmon for tobacco; but the tired and already mud-bedraggled prospectors slept heavily upon the damp, cold ground when too much exhausted to proceed further with their "packing."

The race was now on. With many it was a race to their death. On sight of the struggle at closer range, men formed themselves into groups or partnerships, thinking thus to simplify and make easier the crossing with their heavy outfits these tremendous mountains. In some instances this was a wise precaution, but in many more cases it was followed by failure to work harmoniously together, and profanity, bad feeling, and quarreling ensued.

Like fish in their native element, or vampires living off others, so the fat and rubicund-visaged owners of the bulky, black barrels before mentioned, flourished on the needs, discouragements and extremity of their brothers. Booths and shacks were expeditiously erected above their barrels dumped out upon the sands, counters and rude seats were provided, while flaring, staring cloth signs were flung out informing all that this was "The Shelter", "Tommy's

Place", or "Your Own Fireside", in order to allure the cold, weary and disheartened travelers into the saloons. Here, in exchange for their money, they were given poisonous and adulterated liquors, imbibing which, with empty stomachs and discouraged hearts, they became ill-natured and selfish, as well as in a chronic state of internal drought.

At Skagway the army of "stampeders" swarmed up into the mountains. Following the Skagway River northward up the Grand Canyon, their difficult trail crossed and recrossed the bed of the stream many times. With small trees "corduroy" bridges were hastily thrown down in spots made impassable by bogs and the continued tread of hundreds of hurrying feet. With quick, impatient axe strokes men struck at overhanging and obstructing trees and vines. On all sides hung huge boulders and cliffs like pouting, protruding lips, as if the mountains had been shaken into shape by some subterrane force and resented even yet their rough treatment. Mosses hung from tree trunks, and vines thickly blanketed the rocks and ledges between which dashed sparkling waterfalls in haste to join the Skagway below. It mat-

tered not if the hot noonday sun at times entered these fastnesses; it served only to cheer the hearts of little birds and animals, and bring to pestiferous life millions of mosquitoes and flies to torment both day and night the unfortunate toilers on the White Pass Trail.

These toilers worked in desperation. Their mad haste was infectious. Men literally tumbled over each other on the trail in their eagerness to put the Passes behind them. Every man carried strapped upon his back as much of a load as it was possible for him to carry, and often times more, with the not infrequent result that they dropped beneath their packs on the trail. In like manner they loaded the animals they drove before them, and here was exhibited man's awful inhumanity to the dumb brutes. Pack horses, mules and dogs, loaded to top-heaviness and cinched until one could almost hear their bones crack, climbed, straining, struggling, panting, wild eyed and steaming from over-exertion under the lash of angry and profane drivers, until they sank to their haunches, helpless and exhausted, in some quagmire. Such common misfortune neces-

sitated the unloading of the poor beast at the loss of time and patience, not only of his own driver, but those following, as any obstruction to this narrow trail was greeted with extreme disfavor.

Language both bad and bitter was hourly exchanged between men on this strenuous stampede to the Klondyke in the fall of '97. Animosities were born which die only when hearts in men's bosoms are forever stilled. Feuds were here originated, which if not settled with firearms were ended in ways as deadly afterwards.

Conditions on the Chilkoot were identical. "Tenderfeet" were there as tender, and the way as rough, even if a trifle shorter than that over the White Pass. Nor were the tempers of the Chilkoot argonauts better than those of their neighbors.

One root of the matter was not far to seek. Had they been content to leave liquors untouched, nerves would have been less often jarred, patience would not have become so soon exhausted, while brains would have been clearer to plan, foresee, and execute. Not every man drank liquors. There were numbers whose strongest stimu-

lant was the fragrant coffee, or water from the mountain springs; and these were among the quiet, helpful ones who plodded patiently and industriously; lending a kindly hand to some unfortunate fallen comrade or animal along the rock-bound trail. They, too, were the ones who soonest reached the first objective point of their journey—the end of mountaineering at Bennett, from which place their boats would carry them into the Klondyke.

Among hundreds of others two travelers one day trudged with heavy packs upon their backs, each following his loaded mule, which, once placed in the long line of men and animals, wending their way toward the mountains, would not, in self-defense choose to deviate from that course.

Both men were strong, of middle age, and with money and supplies enough to take them into the gold fields. After landing at Skagway they decided to go into partnership, chiefly for the purpose of receiving assistance.

Little thought was given by either to the help he was to render his partner; and although they had now been but a few days together, each had already reminded the other

of some fancied duty to himself; which act, often repeated, will sometimes stir up unpleasantly the muddy waters of men's souls. After having gotten a late start from Skagway, they had gone only about two miles up the Canyon when both men and mules seemed too much fagged to proceed further without rest, and as night was close upon them they decided to make camp.

Turning to the west side of the Canyon they moved laboriously among fallen logs, boulders and driftwood, and through the tangle of vines, ferns, and foliage which also barred their way.

When they were well out of sight of their trail companions they found themselves close under a huge wall of rock in the steep mountain side which made a quiet spot for camping.

Selecting an open space between trees, the packs of all were deposited upon the ground. Men and mules now breathed deeply, and rested strained muscles, so chafed beneath the heavy and unaccustomed packs.

"Give the mules enough rope, but fasten 'em tight, Smithson," said one, "we don't want 'em wanderin' away and we havin' to

hunt 'em up. Time is too precious on this trail, and there are too many fellows around wishin' fur just such mules. We'd have a dandy time hiking it over the Pass with our four tons of grub all on our backs, wouldn't we?"

"It would take us a year, sure," was the reply, "and may as it is. I know one thing. I'm goin' to take a drink before continuing these proceedings, and I advise you to do the same," pulling a flat bottle from his "jumper" pocket and putting it to his lips.

For answer his companion dropped the sticks he had been gathering for a fire, and produced a duplicate bottle which he quickly appropriated in like manner.

To an old miner, inured to such life, the work of pitching camp here would have been slight, but to these men it was a new experience. Cooking upon a camp fire, sleeping upon a bed of boughs, cut from the thicket when exhausted after new and hard labor was bad enough; but when to this was added the almost unendurable stinging and singing of the ever present mosquitoes it was a thousand fold worse. A good fire and smoke must be kept going all night, and by lying close beside

it they hoped to get some rest from the insects.

Before sleeping the two men planned their next day's work. They would leave everything and ride back to Skagway for another load of supplies, getting all here under the rock before proceeding further up the trail.

In the meantime the bothersome winged insects buzzed and flirted. They crept into the ears of men and mules in spite of the long journey the latter necessitated; the poor brutes learned after a time either to keep up a continual flopping of these head ornaments, or to assume a low, drooping position, thus keeping their ear chambers closed to visitors; while their caudal appendages were not allowed a moment's respite from duty. The men relieved themselves of bitter and revengeful sentiments toward their unwelcome visitants by deep and hearty curses, until a little later, worn and weary, in the camp-fire "smudge" they slept despite their discomforts. It is not really known, but it is supposed, that the two long eared animals might have done good work that night had they been wise enough to also raise their voices in protest; the mosquitoes of these mountain fastnesses being as yet

unused to such foreign and reverberating sounds.

However, the men slept fitfully, though they arose in testy humor the following morning and took immediate recourse to their whiskey bottles upon awaking.

The mules were still fastened to a tree nearby. They had crossed in front of the wall of rock which was moss covered to such an extent that its face was considerably hidden, and then climbed higher in an attempt to secure the best herbage, and were still browsing.

"Smithson, you're the youngest, you fetch the mules while I make the fire for breakfast," said Roberts to his companion, yawning and rubbing his mosquito bitten hands and face.

"Do it yourself! I'm only two years younger than you. If I'm going to hear that gag every time there is anything extra hard to do on this trip I'll quit now and hunt a boy to work with," was the disgruntled answer.

"Do it then! I don't care; though I don't think it's harder to get the mules than to bring water, cut wood, and get breakfast, do you? I'll swap jobs if you want to, but getting the mules includes watering them at the creek, of

course."

"Oh, yes, of course," echoed Smithson in a surly voice.

"You better get a move on or I'll have breakfast cooked and eaten before you get 'round to anything. You needn't suppose I'm going to do your work and mine, too," was the impatient rejoinder of Roberts as he swung his axe hard into a stick of wet wood he was cutting.

Smithson shuffled off up the bluff in search of the animals, which, when found, were treated in no very kindly manner by the sour faced, mosquito-bitten and generally disgusted tenderfoot, whose introduction into this new world was, apparently, taking all good-nature out of him.

The mules made no resistance and were soon poking their noses into the creek waters where Smithson had led them. When he returned to camp expecting to find a smoking breakfast awaiting him, he was disappointed. Looking about for Roberts he saw him against the face of the cliff nearly half way to its top.

"Smithson, come here quick," called Roberts in a voice trembling with excitement.

"I won't do it! I want my breakfast. What are you doing? Picking wild flowers, I suppose. How're we goin' to get along without grub, I'd like to know. Come down, I say!"

Roberts appeared to be working industriously. Finally he rose from his stooping position, and motioning to his partner, called out in a low tone:

"Come quick, man, or you'll be sorry! Never mind breakfast; you can eat that any day; but you don't see this sight often."

With that Smithson ambled over to the foot of the cliff.

"What is it?" he inquired crossly.

"Catch this bit of rock and look at it," said Roberts in a low, excited voice, dropping a small white fragment at the feet of the other.

"By Jove! Roberts, it carries gold!"

"Shut your mouth! Don't tell the men on the trail! These hills have ears and plenty of 'em. Come up here quick, but first bring a pick and hammer from the packs."

With that the dilatory fellow forgot his hunger, his mosquito-bitten hands and face, and in less than two minutes was climbing up

the cliff with the tools.

He found his partner looking well pleased but perspiring. As Smithson joined him he sat down on the rock and mopped his face with his red bandana.

"What made you come up here?" asked Smithson, "I thought you were gettin' the grub."

"So I was, but I had no dry wood, and saw some near the foot of the cliff. Coming to get it I saw that the ropes of the mules had crossed this rock and as they climbed higher their ropes pulled tighter and had worn off the moss which fell to the ground below. Among this moss there were several bits of whitish rock which seemed to be quartz. Then I saw a spot high above my head that looked like the small piece below, and climbed to see, when you came back and found me."

"What do you think of it?" asked Smithson.

"Think of it? Why, man, we have struck a quartz ledge with gold in it! See that shiny yellow stuff, scattered through this rock! Can't you tell gold when you see it?"

"Yes, but perhaps that's all there is of it

—what then?"

"A likely story! No, sir, there's more where that comes from. Give me that pick! You scrape off the moss and break up some of the rock as I get it out, and we'll see what it looks like; but above all things we must not forget to speak low, for by Jiminy crickets! we don't want to see anyone around here but you and me."

"What about goin' to Skagway for the freight?"

"We won't go to-day. We've got enough grub to last till to-morrow. We'll work right here."

They did so. Even the mosquitoes were forgotten. At noon they wondered what made them feel so faint. The bottles in their "jumper" pockets were empty—they had eaten nothing since the night before. Both at last decided to quit work and prepare their meal before prospecting further.

In their eager efforts to get at the width of the ledge the men afterwards scraped off the moss and vines, by this means exposing what appeared to be a four foot vein. On each side of this vein ran a wall of hard, dark rock they did not recognize, but the

quartz was quartz and carried free gold; and that at present was enough for them. In their ignorance they knew nothing of which way the vein "dipped", of what the "gangue" was composed, nor how often and where "faults" occurred. The question in hand was the presence of gold and the length, width, and depth of the quartz lode. The gold was really there in pretty yellow streaks and spots, shining brightly in whichever way it was turned.

Of course Roberts claimed the discovery. This angered his partner.

"The mules are the real discoverers," declared Smithson with spirit, "and one of them is mine. You knew very well that the quartz was there when you sent me after the animals so you could prospect the place."

"You're a liar, and you know it!" retorted Roberts, hotly. "There is none so suspicious of others as a rogue. If you understood mining laws you would know that by being my partner one half of all I find is yours without your raising a finger, and you could quit this howl before beginning. A man may be an idiot in the States if he chooses, but here he needs all the sense he was

born with besides what he can cultivate." With this thrust Roberts picked up his tools to resume his prospecting.

"I like that first rate. It reminds me of home and Hannah. I presume you want me to put these things in a grub box and wash the dishes while you go out to prospect your quartz ledge, don't you?" sneered Smithson, in whose temper there was little improvement since he had eaten because his stock of whiskey and tobacco was exhausted.

"It is almost as easy as swinging a heavy iron pick, I reckon," replied Roberts sarcastically.

With this the men parted. A fresh dispute soon arose, however, as to whether the ledge should be immediately staked or not.

"We would surely be fools to go and leave it for others, especially as it is uncovered and in plain sight," objected Smithson.

"We will cover it so that none can find it. If we stake the ledge it must be recorded in Skagway, and the moment we do that our secret is out. By simply planting stakes or monuments, we cannot hold the ground from others, but it must be on record. Now if we stop here long all these fellows on the trail

will get into Dawson ahead of us and gobble up the claims. We started out for placer gold—creek gold—not quartz gold which takes machinery for development. By going to Dawson first we may find enough to allow of our opening up this ledge in a year or two."

"Well, I've always heard that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush', and if this is true I think we'd better stay right here."

"If you knew more you would kick less. It takes a lot more money to open up quartz mines than we've got or ever may have. But I see what you're after. You want to stay near Skagway and its well warmed barrooms, don't you?" laughed Roberts.

"You go to blazes!"

"No, no, I'm going to Dawson. But first I think we'd better drop this business and pack our supplies from Skagway, don't you?" asked the more sensible man of the two.

"Yes, yes," said Smithson, who was thinking of his whiskey and tobacco in that place, and of his chronic thirst which water from the mountain could not allay.

Before leaving, the new prospect hole was hidden from the view of stragglers. A few tall saplings were felled, which, with foliage still upon them, were pushed over the edge of the cliff with stems downward in order that their leafy tops might rest against the prospected rock and temporarily hide the new discovery. In case anyone happened that way it would appear to them that the saplings had been felled and dropped over the cliff for firewood.

By this time the White Pass trail had grown to be a veritable horror. Men were ill and suffering from hard work and exposure. Animals lay dead at the foot of cliffs, over the edges of which they had slipped or been crowded with packs still strapped upon their sore and bleeding backs. Others lay, stripped of all accoutrements, in the hot sunshine among the buzzing flies, after a broken leg had necessitated a bullet in the head, thus causing stenches to fill the nostrils of the already suffering and oppressed passersby. No one had time to bury animals. If a man fell it was, of course, obligatory to halt from their "packing" long enough to dig a shallow bed among the rocks; but this done, and a

handful of granite fragments heaped above his head, the procession moved on as before. No time could be spared for headstone marking; and long after these strugglers of the argonauts on the White Pass Trail were forgotten by all but the participants (who will never to their dying day forget them) these lonely mounds of the fallen men could at intervals have been seen flanked by bleaching bones of defunct animals.

Lonely indeed were these dreary resting places. The scream of the eagle as he easily swung on powerful pinions from cliff to cliff on family errands or to drink at the foot of some rushing cascade was the only dirge that was sung. Ferns swayed gently in shaded nooks, and wild flowers nodded familiarly to each other. Filmy winged bees flitted with bustling movement head foremost into the cups of bluebells beneath skies as azure as they, and in atmosphere as pure as God could make it.

In winter all this was changed. Snow covered the little mounds as well as the whole surrounding region; and intermittently the falling flakes whirled and drifted into ravines and canyons, making them level with the steep

mountain-sides; presently melting under the sunshine and beginning a race to the sea.

However, the argonauts hurried on. They were not here to moralize—they had something else to do.

As the two men proceeded, making numerous trips with the freight laden mules between camps, they found, much to their disappointment, that, without assistance, they would not be able to reach Lake Bennett in time to build a boat and make their way into the Klondyke before being overtaken by winter.

In order to proceed faster it would be necessary to hire Indian packers to help them over the summit of the Pass, else the sun of another summer would see them still wearily toiling on that terrible trail.

Indians were then hired. The great mountain tops, bald of everything save boulders and a few saucer-shaped lakelets reflecting in their cold depths the floating clouds above, seemed now for the first time to encourage the harassed and footsore travelers.

Soon they were cheered by entering a forest. Here was fuel in abundance, and shelter, at least partial, from frosts and rain. Below, the green and level "meadows" beckoned to

them, and still farther the shining waters of Bennett. But trail troubles would soon for them be over, and with lighter hearts, though with weary feet and backs, they stumbled on in their eagerness to reach the long waterway which was to guide them into the promised land.

Beautiful Bennett! How pure its waters, and how clean its sands! With what maidenly modesty it nestles in the rugged arms of its lovers, the sky-piercing mountains!

Tents were everywhere. Cabins rose in a night. In surrounding thickets were the axes of men heard, felling trees for boat-building. Night and day this continued, and turns were taken at sleeping in order that the work might not be stopped; indeed, some men seemed never to sleep, so intent were they on making an early entrance into the gold fields ahead.

Not so, Smithson. He slept more than ever. His bottle made him drowsy. It did not increase the sweetness of his naturally selfish disposition, which under the delays, hardships, and extra expense of their journey had rather increased his laziness and stubbornness.

Nothing Roberts did pleased him. They often came to words, but never to blows in an

argument, for sooner than do this Roberts would turn on his heel and leave his partner to fall asleep and thus escape his burden of the work.

"Come now," said Roberts one morning, "our boat is nearly finished and we ought to be off and away in about two days. You can surely do the caulking of seams, after which I'll paint her."

"I never caulked a boat in my life, and I think it a poor time to begin," said Smithson. "If it isn't done right all hands may go to the bottom. You better get someone else to do it."

"There is nobody but me to do it unless we pay ten dollars a day, and we can't afford that. I've done most of the work so far, and I think you might take hold now like a man if you never do again," argued Roberts.

The words "like a man" nettled Smithson. He resented the inference that he was not manly. Seizing his hat he shambled off toward the beach where the boat was in process of construction.

His heart was filled with anger. He began fairly to hate Roberts. He had no right to order him around, and he hated to leave that

quartz ledge. If Roberts were only out of his way the hidden ledge would all be his own. He had pondered this many times when his working partner supposed him sleeping. Only for Roberts he could sell the boat and supplies for double their cost, return to Skagway, and build a cabin near the quartz ledge, thus escaping the long and dangerous trip down the lakes and rivers as well as the awful Arctic winter which he more and more dreaded in the Klondyke. On the south side of the mountains the weather would be more mild; he would have no difficulty in finding another partner, if not of his own sex, then the other —why not? he asked himself. The owner of a ledge like that one might afford luxuries beyond those of the common people. In this way he ruminated, standing with his hands in pockets alongside the boat he was expected to finish by caulking.

Smithson hated work. Why should he work? There was enough gold in the big ledge on the other side of the summit to keep him as long as he lived if he could have the whole and manage it to suit himself. Could a boat be caulked lightly in spots, he wondered, so that such weak places might be plug-

ged at the proper moment afterwards, making it fill with water and sink with its freight?

It might be done, but that would be bad policy, for freight landed even this far had cost large sums of money; farther on it would be worth more and could be sold for many times what they had paid for it at starting; but men were far too plenty. One man would not be missed. It might be managed, perhaps, and he decided to do the caulking as requested by Roberts.

An hour later a fair beginning had been made. A fire was built over which the smoke of melting pitch ascended, while oakum was filling the seams of the boat's sides under the hands of the new ship-builder.

Smithson could work if he liked. When his partner, after taking a much needed rest and nap, came out to see how the business was progressing he was well pleased. The work appeared satisfactory.

"I'm afraid you'll be sick, old fellow, after such exertion as this," laughed he with a twinkle in his eye, "for you're breaking your record, sure; but keep right on; I'll get paint and brushes in readiness to start my job the moment you've done. The sun will soon dry

all thoroughly," and he hastened back to their tent.

For reply the new workman only lighted his pipe. His mind was busy and he needed a nerve-quieter. The train of thought in which he had just indulged was strange, and rather disquieting—altogether he needed the smoke.

The common industry at Bennett was now the launching of boats. Hundreds of frail and faulty craft were started upon their long voyage to the Klondyke laden with freight to the water's edge. Men who had never before used a saw, axe, or plane, here built boats and sailed courageously away.

Smithson and Roberts had done the same.

It was late in the afternoon. The storm clouds were rapidly gathering overhead. The men had raised a sail and were scudding northward before the wind towards Caribou. If they could make the crossing that night, Roberts said, they would be in luck. To sleep on shore and sail again next morning was his plan.

Night came on. No other craft was near. The wind flapped their small sail and the yardarm wobbled badly. Roberts sat in the stern.

"Mind the sail, there, Smithson, and pull that tarpaulin over the grub pile, for by Jingo! we're goin' to catch it now!" as the cold rain dashed full against their faces, and they both crouched lower in the boat.

"Haul in the sail!" shouted Roberts, an instant later at the top of his voice, and Smithson arose presumedly to obey.

"Haul in the sail!" repeated Roberts while tending the rudder, as the other hesitated.

With that the man addressed moved, but not in the way expected. He grasped the yardarm and swung it suddenly and heavily around against Roberts.

Instantly the side of the little craft dipped low, shipping water, but the roar of the gale drowned the noise of a sudden splash. A cry of horror, the flash of two hands in the water, and the boat sped madly away on her course.

Ten minutes later the white capped waters tossed a boat upon the beach near Caribou. Its one occupant looked wildly around in the darkness but presently managed to make a fire by which to warm and dry himself.

He muttered incoherently meanwhile.

"I didn't do it—'twas the wind—dark and wild—couldn't stop the boat—terrible storm —two hands in the water—Jove! where's that whiskey?" and he fumbled among the supplies under the tarpaulin. When he had found it and drunk deeply he felt stronger and replenished the fire.

"The ledge! The hidden ledge! It's all mine now, yes, mine, mine!" and he hugged himself in his greedy, guilty joy.

"To-morrow I'll sell the grub and backtrack to the coast to guard it."

The storm died away and the cold, bright moon shone searchingly. The man lay down in the boat to rest, pulling his furs and tarpaulin over him.

Sleep did not immediately come at his bidding. He saw and heard affrighting things. The rush and roar of the elements —two hands flashing out of the ink-black water—the cry of horror—but he wanted to forget, and at last, in spite of all, he slept.

* * * * * * * *

An Indian guide trudged heavily up the long trail toward the summit. He was closely followed by a white man and both

were headed southward. The guide carried a heavy pack on his back, but the white man was "traveling light."

When night came they camped and rested; amusing themselves for a while with a poker game. Black bottles kept them company. At last trouble arose over the cards. Smithson had indiscreetly allowed his guide a glimpse of his money belt, and though the white man was well armed, in a moment of forgetfulness he allowed the native to pass behind him; when a sudden shot and thud upon the ground quickly settled forever all scores between them.

An Indian seldom smiles.

This one smiled gloomily now; muttering as he wiped the revolver in his hand:

"Him bad white man yesterday,—good man now,—heap long time sleep."

Half an hour later the sure-footed Indian cautiously made his way along the trail. Stars twinkled overhead. A well filled money belt, a revolver, and blankets ornamented his person, though only the latter were visible.

The "Hidden Ledge" was close at hand, but unknowingly he passed it by; its secret having been, for the present, buried with the

two partners who were numbered among the strenuous stampeders on the White Pass Trail.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW KLONDYKE

TWO miners sat smoking in a small log cabin in Dawson. They were hardy young fellows, and used the accent of born Canadians. They were brothers, and the elder was speaking.

"What's the use of our hanging 'round here all winter doing nothing? The best creeks are all staked, and there isn't the ghost of a show for us to get any first class ground hereabouts. Let's light out, blaze a new trail for ourselves, and prospect in the likeliest places during the winter instead of idling away our time here, eating up high-priced grub and hating ourselves. I'm sick of this camp. What do you say?"

"Which way shall we go?"

"Any old way. No, it would be better to have some definite idea of the point we wish to reach, of course. We might make for the headwaters of the Klondyke and then east into the unknown country where only a few poor Indians live."

"They might prove ugly. What then?"

"We could manage them. We would take plenty of grub and ammunition, and a couple of white men, at least, with us."

"What makes you think there's gold there? It wouldn't pay us to risk our lives for nothing in such a wilderness. I would be willing to go if I thought our time and efforts might turn up something good."

"I have been watching the Indians who come here for supplies from that direction, and they are far from penniless. They carry good-sized pokes of nuggets and dust which they use in trading. They must get these from some of the creeks over east," said the elder of the two men.

"They are mum as oysters; one can't get any information from them."

"What'll you bet I can't?"

"A box of cigars," laughed the younger, whose name seemed appropriately bestowed, for it was Thomas, and he often doubted.

With that George MacDougall drew on his fur coat and mittens and quitted the cabin. He would find a certain long haired Indian he had seen that day, and prove to his brother that he was not simply a boaster.

It was early in the evening; but for the matter of that, the hour made little difference, for time slipped by unreckoned in the Klondyke in winter. Night was more often than not turned into day by the restless denizens of the mining camp, and belated breakfast sometime the following afternoon was the sequel.

Just now the moon shown brightly above the camp, the deep frozen river and the high hills. George MacDougall could plainly hear the loud talking and shouts of those bent on dissipation while crossing the ice by dog-team to West Dawson. Glancing in that direction he saw the brilliantly lighted dance-house and saloon, whose blare of brassy instruments reached his unwilling ears at that distance; the still, cold air of an Arctic night being a perfect conductor of sound. Under the sheltering, furry fringe of his cap his forehead gathered itself into a scowl.

"What fools!" he muttered. "If one must carouse why come here? That sort of thing can be done on the 'outside', but in here where grub is worth its weight in gold, and none expect comforts, why waste time? We came here for that we cannot obtain in the States

—at least I did—for gold,—gold, and I'll have it, too, by Gad!" Then pricking up his ears again at the end of his soliloquy, he listened and laughed aloud.

"Hear those malamute cusses! How they do whoop it up, to be sure," as a familiar canine chorus surged clearcut through the frosty air. "I'd rather listen any time to the brutes zig-zagging up and down their scales than to the giggling 'box rustlers' from the Monte Carlo crossing yonder to the dance-house; but where's that blooming Indian, I wonder? I must find him," and the stalwart Canadian moved on more quickly up the main street.

An hour later he again smoked in his cabin with his brother. Opposite them sat an Indian with long, black hair. The latter held in his hand a whiskey glass, now almost drained, the contents of which had no doubt called up the good-humored expression at the corners of the native's habitually unsmiling mouth.

The Canadians smoked; their chair-backs tilted against the wall. There was no hurry. The elder MacDougall re-filled the Indian's glass with liquor, and leisurely and carefully

knocking the ashes from his pipe, placed it upon a shelf. He then took from an inside pocket a half dozen cigars of reputable brand and placed one between his lips, by chance, probably, glancing toward his visitor, whose fingers now twitched at sight of the much relished tobacco stick.

"Plenty gold where you come from?" carelessly interrogated MacDougall, his eyes on the lighted end of his cigar, and flirting away the match he had been using.

"Yes," grunted the Indian in answer.

"Can we find it, too, Pete?" queried the white man, at the same moment holding one of the cigars toward his visitor, who eagerly seized it.

"I tink."

"Will you show us a gold creek, Pete?" continued the patiently questioning Canadian.

"How much you give?"

"I'll give you a gallon of whiskey and a box of good cigars if you will take me with my brother here to your gold creek, or any gold creek that is not taken up by white men already. Understand, Pete?"

The Indian nodded. He loved liquor bet-

ter than gold, but Yukon authorities had prohibited the sale of the stuff to Indians, and strictly enforced the law, so, though he had attempted in various ways to purchase it in Dawson he had not been successful. Here was the offer of a whole gallon in exchange for gold so far away that the white man would probably die before he reached it, even if he attempted to cover the distance; and the Indian acquiesced in the bargain.

Thomas MacDougall wanted to be shown some of Pete's gold, and so remarked; whereupon the latter thrust his hand into his trouser's pockets, well hidden by the fur parkie he wore, took out a poke and threw it upon the table. When Thomas had untied the string and held the moose-hide sack by its two lower corners bottom upwards there clattered out upon the boards enough of good-sized golden nuggets to cause the eyes of the doubter to sparkle with interest.

"Are you sure you did not steal these from some white man's cabin on Bonanza or Eldorado, Pete?" queried the skeptic Thomas.

"No steal 'um,—catch 'um big crik,—plent' gold,—heap. You sabee?"

Thomas understood, but only partly believed. His brother argued that it was a case of "nothing venture, nothing have" and he would take the risk and follow Pete into the wintry wilderness.

If indecision is a sign of weak minds then there are but few feeble-minded men in an Alaskan gold camp. Here men decide matters quickly. It is touch and go with them. This trip might mean the end of all things earthly to the two MacDougalls, but they determined to make the venture. They might fail of finding gold in quantities, but that was their fate if they remained in Dawson. They could die but once. Having risked so much, and come so far already, it was small effort to stake still more of time, effort and money, and they decided to follow Pete.

A week later the two brothers, (their company augmented by two white men and as many Indians, besides long-haired Pete, the guide) might have been seen slowly but carefully making their way through the snowy hill region of the headwaters of the Klondyke River. Mapped carelessly, as it often is, this appears a small and unpretend-

ing stream; but to the Indian or prospector who has tracked its length from a small creeklet at starting to a wide and rushing mouth emptying its pure waters into the muddy Yukon, it has a good length of several hundred miles, and must not be lightly mentioned. On its "left limit" were Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks where men with underground fires burning both night and day tried with puny strength to checkmate the stubborn ice king in order to add to the dumps to be hopefully washed out in the springtime. Though they burned their eyes from their sockets in these pestilential smoke holes, and though from badly cooked and scanty meals their blackened limbs made declaration that the dreaded scurvy was upon them; still there were always men eager to fill the places of those who succumbed, and the work went on.

There were creeks called Bear, Rock, Benson, Wolf, Gnat and Fox, which with Nello, Arizona, and many more, went to make up the far-famed Klondyke River.

Now all were fast frozen. Snow lay deep upon the ice. No babbling of hurrying waters over pebbly creek beds was heard, but

instead, the axe of the solitary miner at wood chopping on the banks of silent streams.

As the short days passed, and the small caravan forged on, the smoke of white men's cabins was more seldom seen; until finally the last one was pointed out by Indian Pete, and it was soon left far behind.

Shorter grew the daylight hours. Proceeding they were forced to break trails, although their guide appeared familiar with the region and was heading toward the best and easiest pass in the Rockies. This tedious snow waste once crossed, their way to the great lakes was comparatively clear.

They soon learned to travel as well in the dusky snow-light as by daylight, and enjoyed it better, for there was no glare of the sun on the white mantled earth. Their dog-teams were good ones, and a source of comfort to the travelers whose experience with this mode of migration was limited. While the weary men slept in their little tents by night the malamutes howled and rested at intervals. If one happened to be startled by a bad dream he immediately communicated the fact to his neighbors, of

whom there were more than thirty, and they, either from sympathetic interest in a brother, or because they resented being waked thus unceremoniously in the midst of enjoyable naps, began echoing their sentiments in the most lugubrious manner. To all sorts of notes in the musical scale the voices of these dogs ranged, they seeming to spare no pains to give varied entertainment. How these creatures work so hard, eat and sleep so little, howl so much, and keep in good condition, is ever an unsolvable riddle; but they are usually docile, pleasant of disposition, and ready for any task.

The MacDougall party treated their animals kindly. Men must reasonably do this in self defense. That a brow-beaten dog gives up and drops from the race through sheer discouragement often happens; but well fed and with considerate treatment a malamute will bravely work to the last moment.

A few hundred miles farther east and these dogs would be exchanged for "Hudson Bay huskies", or sent back over the trail to Dawson to be sold. In case the MacDougalls "struck it rich" in the Indian

country it was imperative that they be provided with huskies, but for the present the "malamute made much music", as Tom MacDougall laughingly remarked.

One day the party came upon the fresh tracks of a caribou. Made by good-sized hoofs, the animal had gone toward the south apparently in great haste. In a moment Pete was off with his rifle to the nearest hill-top, steathily but rapidly treading the soft, deep snow. The elder MacDougall shouldered his gun and followed the trail of the animal whose flesh he coveted as a feasting dish after living so long upon dried fish and bacon.

For more than an hour the Canadian tracked his game. Pete, from the hill-top, had sighted a tiny thread of blue smoke rising from the valley on the other side, and knew that Indians, probably Peel River men, were also upon the track of the animal, when instantly his enthusiasm in the chase cooled.

He decided to follow MacDougall. If these were the Peel River Indians they were far from their own hunting grounds, and must have driven big game into this vicinity which they were loath to abandon. In case

that MacDougall should bring down the caribou he might get into trouble, and Pete hastened on.

The cold, crisp air was intensely still. As he proceeded, with alert ears, he heard a shot, angry voices in altercation, and a second shot, when the now thoroughly awakened Indian hurried on in the footprints of the Canadian.

One of the hunters would probably hunt no more; but which one was it?

He was not long in doubt. Coming suddenly upon them he discovered that his fears were realized.

MacDougall stood sternly regarding a fur-dressed Indian lying dead upon the snow. He and Pete exchanged glances.

"What's the matter?" asked Pete.

"He jumped upon me and declared the caribou was his. I told him it was mine, when he pulled his gun and I shot him—that's all," said MacDougall.

"That's plent'," tersely from Pete. Then casting his eye over the sky he said: "Snow cum quick,—hide um. We cut caribou," whereupon he whipped out a big hunting knife, after placing his rifle in the crotch of

a tree, and began slashing the still warm body of the big caribou.

MacDougall followed suit. It was not long before the two had selected and cut away the choice parts of the carcass, and with as much of the meat as they could handle, made their way back to camp. Pete and his Indians, with dog-teams, were dispatched to the scene of the double tragedy for the remainder.

The dead Indian was left as he fell, and falling snow soon covered him.

That night the Canadians pushed on without resting, laden with as much meat as they could carry. It was thought safest not to remain long in the vicinity, as some of the Peel River Indians might track the murderer of their brother.

The dogs had feasted on caribou as well as the men, and all could return to the long trail with redoubled energy. More large game was seen, and from this on there was no lack of venison.

Ptarmigan, too, made a variety of eating. The snow-white beauties were never tired of, but furnished food equally as good as the caribou. The miners were given a pleas-

ant surprise one evening when George MacDougall cleaned the birds for his breakfast. Three or four peculiar looking pebbles rolled out of the craw of the bird he was handling and fell upon the ground. Stooping, he picked them up.

" 'Gad! What's this?"

"He then made an examination.

"Here you, Indian! Get some ice and melt it. I want to wash these stones. If they are stones, I'll eat 'em. I believe they're gold nuggets," he added to his brother, at which the latter crawled out of his fur sleeping bag to investigate.

They were now in a gold-bearing country. Of this MacDougall felt assured. The nuggets found in the craw of the ptarmigan, though not large, were of pure gold, and once clean of filth looked good to the eyes of the patient prospectors. They had certainly come from the bars of some stream, which, in an exposed place, had been wind-swept, furnishing the grouse a late feeding ground when tundra berries were covered with snow. To be sure, not much nourishment could have been gotten from the nuggets, but the latter had answered the purpose of pebbles

in mastication processes.

After this MacDougall kept more hopefully on. Each bird shot was examined, and many carried their own savings bank with them. No better indications were wanted of the contents of the creeks of the region.

The gold was surely there.

Finally, after six cold and weary weeks, during which time much of hope and fear had constantly alternated in the breasts of the two Canadians and their men, notwithstanding the reiterated affirmative statements of the Indians; Pete grunted with satisfaction and pointed to a nearby forest.

"Indian cabins over there," said he. "Two sleeps cum rich crik."

"I hope so, Pete," MacDougall had replied, being tired and hungry.

Only twice on their long trip had they come upon small Indian settlements, and then a few hours' rest within the crowded and stifling huts satisfied them to resume their march. The air outside, if cold, was pure, sweet and invigorating, and these hardy, fur clad men were now accustomed to it and enjoyed it.

A fresh surprise awaited them at Pete's house. A good, large, log cabin of two rooms, lined from top to bottom with the furs of animals, and ornamented with antlers and similar trophies of the chase, made a warm and comfortable home compared to that which the white men had expected to find. A pleasant-faced squaw and several small children retreated to the inner room upon the entrance of the men from the trail. While Pete greeted his family, the visitors made notes and discussed the surprising situation.

"Gee Whiz! Who'd a thought it?"

"I thought Pete lived in an ice hut, or a teepee made of skins and sticks," said one.

"A filthy hole in the ground was what I thought we'd find," declared another.

"We're right in civilization!" exclaimed a fourth, slapping his knee in delight.

"A music box, as I live!" eyeing an old accordian in a corner.

"Well, I snum!"

The men were all talking at once.

"I'd like to take a smoke, but don't dare," said Tom MacDougall, demurely, with a wink.

"I fancy it might injure the lace curtains," laughed his brother, who looked as well pleased as any of the group, while touching the bit of calico draping at the tiny window.

But Pete was now going out of doors and they all trooped after him. Surrounding the Indian they plied him with a hundred questions. They wanted to know where he and his squaw had learned to make a home like this,—where he got so much of civilization, —who had taught his squaw to keep house, —who played the accordian,—where he got tools to work with, and many other things; above all, where he bought certain accessories to his cabin which they had never seen in Dawson.

Flinging, as they did, all these questions at the poor fellow in a breath, MacDougall feared he would be stalled for replies, and finally halted for him to make a beginning; but Pete only remarked quietly, twitching his thumb toward the southeast:

"Fort by big lake. White man,—mission, —teach um Indian," unconcernedly, as though it was of every day occurrence, and there was no further explanation necessary.

"Do they talk as we do?" asked Mac-

Dougall.

"No."

"What do you call them?"

"Father Petroff,—teach um. Indian sick, —fix um. Heap good man," and Pete turned away, thinking this sufficient.

"Ask him how far it is to the Fort, Mac," said one of the men.

"Not now. He has had enough quizzing for this time. It is evidently a Russian Mission on one of the big lakes,—which mission, and what lake, I don't know. But we must pitch our tents, cook our supper, and feed the dogs. Poor fellows! They shall have a good long rest soon for they've well earned it," and George MacDougall patted the snow white head of the nearest malamute looking up into his face for sympathy.

Next day the men had eaten, slept and rested. They had listened the evening before to the old accordian in the hands of Pete's wife; they had trotted the infant of the family on their knees; they had propounded another hundred questions to their uncommunicative host and gotten monsyllabic answers; but they had heard only that which was good to hear, and that which con-

firmed the leader in his mind that he had made a capital move in coming into this country with the Indians.

Pete had exhibited nuggets and gold dust of astonishing richness. Kicking a bear skin from the center of the room, he disclosed a box embedded in the earth, the sight of which, when uncovered, caused the white men to feel repaid for coming. There were chunks and hunks of the precious yellow metal larger than the thumbs of the brawny handed miners; besides gold dust in moose-hide sacks tied tightly and placed systematically side by side in rows.

The surprise of the white men was great. They did not imagine that Pete mined gold to any extent, but thought he had secured enough in a desultory way for his present use. The trusting native had no fear of the men, having unreservedly laid bare his treasure house.

"I no lie. I tell um truf," said Pete, looking toward Thomas MacDougall, remembering that the doubter had frequently called into question his word.

"We see your gold, Pete, but you must show us a gold creek, too," was Tom's an-

swer to the Indian.

"I show you. Come!"

* * * * * * * *

Three years passed. The great lakes south of the headwaters of the Mackenzie River were again frozen. Darkness claimed the land except when the brilliant low-swinging moon lighted the heavens and snowy earth below, and the sun for a few brief hours consented to coldly shine upon the denizens of the wilderness at midday.

A gang of miners worked like beavers in the bed of the stream. With fires they thawed the ground, after having diverted the creek waters the previous summer.

Their camp was a large one. Fifty men worked in two shifts, one half in the daytime, the others at night. At the beginning of each month they were changed, and night men were placed on the day force; this alternation being found best in all mining camps. Log cabins and bunk houses were numerous, large, and comfortable, for forests of excellent timber dotted the Mackenzie landscape, and men, as ever ambitious for comfort, had felled, hewed, and crosscut the trees to their liking.

Much that was crude of construction was here in confirmation of the fact that the camp was far removed from civilization, and men had, with great ingenuity, supplied deficiencies whenever practicable.

As helpers who were ever faithful there were "Hudson Bay huskies" to the number of four score who had become real beasts of burden, and vied with each other as to which should carry the palm for leadership and favor in their masters' eyes. They were mainly used for hauling wood and ice; the latter in lieu of water at this season.

For carrying gravel and dirt to the dumps the miners had constructed rude tramways with small flat cars, which being successfully operated by gravity in all weather left the dogs free for other service.

No sluicing of dumps could now be done. When summer came again and the creeks and rivers were full of water, this would be directed into ditches conveying it to the well arranged heaps of dirt and gravel, and then these dumps rapidly melted like snow before hot sunshine, leaving in their wake a stream of yellow metal so coveted by these fearless and daring miners.

For no small amount of gold had they risked their lives in this far away corner of the earth. Only four of the miners had come on uncertainty,—the four guided by Indian Pete three years before,—the others had known why they came, how far the distance, how cold it grew, and many other points of which it is well to be advised before venturing; but they had come, and here they were.

Not a man regretted his coming. Not even old Charlie, after breaking his leg and having to wait for days while two Indians "mushed" southward to the Fort, four hundred miles away, for Father Petrof to come and set it right again.

None heard him complain; though some of the "boys" tried to force him to confess that he wished himself back in Dawson.

"Not by a jugful! I don't give in like a baby," said he, stoutly, although the pain in his limb must have been considerable. "There aint no whiskey in me system, either, to keep me leg from healin' when it's once put right (though I'll admit there is some tobac), and I'll be in trim again presently," declared the gritty old miner.

Having nothing better to do while in his bunk he talked on, addressing the camp cook who had a few leisure moments from the kitchen.

"I've seed many a gold camp in me day, boy, and plenty as good as the Klondyke before I ever struck that Canadian bird; but I never got into ground so rich as this. I tell you, boy, it not only makes me eyes bug out, but it makes me hair stand on end, fur it's a whale of a gold creek! When I lay here studyin' the old tin cans and grub boxes full of gold under these bunks, and get to computin' what's in 'em, I feel like hollerin' for joy!"

"But its all Mac's gold, you know," said the cook regretfully.

"Yes, but you and me are gettin' the biggest wages we ever got in our lives, and Mac never squirms at payin' either. Then we have a reasonable hope that Sister Creek is as good as this one, and we boys have got it all staked,—that's where we're comin' in at. See?"

"I hope to. How much do you calculate there is under the bunks in this room, Charlie? I'd just like to know."

"There's about half a million dollars in this cabin and as much in the dumps as they stand now. By cleanin' up time next summer there'll be half a million more at least; judgin' from indications. That aint half bad, eh?" and Charlie's eyes shone as he talked.

"By George! It's great, and no mistake; but a fellow can't spend any of it here," said the cook ruefully.

"All the better for us. We've got to save it. We can't do nothin' else. Great box we're in, to be sure," and the man laughed heartily in spite of his infirmity. Continuing, he said:

"It's the best place we could be in, I tell you; especially so for Bill who can't buy a drop of whiskey for a thousand dollars, although he would buy it sometimes at that price, I think, if he could."

"It don't hinder him playing that violin of his'n, does it? Do you mind how he played last night?"

"You bet your life. I had nothin' else to do. He's a crackerjack, and that's no josh, either. But here comes Mac. What in thunder's that?" The question was put to

the man entering with a heavy load in his hands.

MacDougall laughed.

"Only a nugget that Tom turned up. I brought it in to show you, and the Canadian placed the mammonth chunk of gold on the floor near the bunk.

"What do you think of it?"

"Great Scott and little fishes! She's a bird! Why, man, this new Klondyke will make the old one look like thirty cents!"

CHAPTER V

ESTELLA THE ESKIMO

ESTELLA was not the name her parents had given her. That was unpronounceable to the white man's tongue and was replaced by Estella when she married the trader not many years ago.

She was a bright and amiable young woman, though not actually pretty. Born and raised on the Seward Peninsula, she had learned to hunt, fish and trap, as do all the Eskimo women while still in their teens. Numbers of young men among her people had sought her hand in marriage, but up to the time of the advent of the white men into the country she had never yielded to their entreaties.

When approached on the subject she glanced demurely down at the toe of her mukluks, tossed back her long hair, and, turning her back on the suitor who did not suit, ran away to play on the beach with the children.

Her people did not know her heart. She had ambition, though it was unknown to them. None of the young Eskimos entirely pleased her. Some one with better looks and more supplies than they must offer himself before she decided to take a life-mate, she told herself.

At her birth some planet must have bestowed upon her many aspirations above those of the common Eskimo, and though she was ignorant of the cause of her ambition she realized the possession of it.

Being a sensible young woman she hid these things in her own bosom, for why should she trouble her parents? They would not understand her, but would oppose, say harsh things, perhaps, and, at any rate, feel badly.

So she ran away to play with the little ones. If this did not answer her purpose she persuaded her young brother to take her in his didarka on the water to some quiet island, where in the pleasant sunshine they sat upon the sandy beach or fished in some gurgling stream.

In winter there was less freedom. She must keep more to her father's igloo and

help her mother at sewing of furs for the clothing, going out at times with the other women to set their traps in the snow for animals whose skins were in demand by the traders.

At last, one day in winter, there came to the home of the Eskimo girl, two white men. They were clothed in furs and rode behind dog-teams. They came to buy skins, principally those of the black fox, mink and white ermine.

One of the men could speak a good deal of the Eskimo language, and had no difficulty in making known their errand. They wished to remain all night in the igloo as it was too late and stormy to proceed farther on the trail.

The Alaskan Eskimo is kindly and generous. No one is ever turned from his door. It matters not how low the state of his larder, or how few sticks there are before the fire; the stranger is always welcome.

The two white traders remained. They bought of the Eskimo what furs they wanted and paid as little for them as possible. A little thread, calico, tea, tobacco, and a few glass beads were given in exchange for the

soft and shining skins which in civilized centers would sell for a fabulous sum.

The storm continued. The traders remained for days. When they left the igloo the heart of the Eskimo maiden was no longer her own; she had given it to another who would presently return and take her to his cabin.

The girl's ambition was now about to be realized. To be looked upon by her people as the bride of a white man, and that one a rich trader who owned, not only a cabin and many skins, but dogs, sleds and boats, was truly a great honor and not to be lightly considered. She would soon be in a position high above that of any of the Eskimo women of her acquaintance, and she began to feel the importance and desirability of her station.

The trader who had succeeded in winning where others had failed was much older than his sweetheart. He was of middle height, with black hair, and swarthy, not unlike in this respect to her own family; but totally different in disposition, a striking contrast to the gentle and yielding character of the Eskimo, but the girl in crass ignorance was

quite unaware of the difference. To her he was an ardent lover, brave, fearless, strong, and with worldly goods to provide her with all she liked and needed.

Poor, simple-hearted, little Eskimo girl! Are your good and kind devas sleeping that they do not better guard you? Of what can they be thinking? Call them quickly to advise and help you before it is too late, and your happiness is forever blasted! Will they not wake in time to keep you from making this terrible mis-step? Beware of the white man whose heart is blackness!

But her good devas slept on. The return of the trader was expected, and as far as lay in their power the Eskimo had made ready for the great and unusual event soon to be celebrated. The igloo was made tidy, heaps of firewood were piled beside the door, and from the cache not far distant were brought quantities of frozen tomcod, seal meat, and salmon berries. Whale oil for illuminating the interior of the snow-covered igloo was bought in puffed out seal bladders, tied at each end by stoutly knotted sinews.

A new fur parkie for the bride made of reindeer skin and decorated with black and

white fur squares for a border, was completed by Eskimo women sitting crosslegged in a corner of the igloo.

At last the white man arrived. He was accompanied by another who was to act as the officiating clergyman; the Eskimo girl wished to have performed the ceremony of his people; but alas! she had not overheard a conversation which had taken place between the two men.

"Get off some rigmarole of your own, I tell you," laughed the coming bridegroom, speaking to his companion, "It's no matter what it is, only don't make me burst out laughing in the middle of it, for Estella might resent it. She's a bright little one, and that's no josh. Seriously, I don't want a bona fide marriage ceremony performed, you understand. When I make my stake and leave Alaska behind forever I don't care to have a legal wife tagging at my coat-tails. I want to be a free man to go and come as I please. See?" and the speaker puffed a cloud of tobacco smoke from between his lips.

"What about the children, Buster? Will there be any?"

"You bet your life! The brats can live as well as those up the country with that other squaw of mine. But you're a terror for questions, pard. If you squeal on me I'll send you to thunder," clapping his hand on his hip pocket where protruded a stout, black handle.

"No fear of me," laughed the other. "I'm too eager for the rest of them fine furs which we must try to get. Can't you work the girl for them, Buster?"

"I'll try. In the meantime get the dogs together to-morrow and feed 'em up. They're lookin' thin. I hope to hear from Dan in a day or two as regards that creek and what he's found in it. Then I'm off to the nest of my turtle dove, for the bridegroom is hungry for his bride, eh, pard?" winked the dark-browed fellow, still smoking heavily.

"You're a dandy, sure!" retorted the man designated as "pard" by the trader. "I see your finish if your squaw's people up country find out your doin's here."

"They never will. The Yukon is many 'sleeps' away, and there is no communication between these Eskimos and the In-

dians."

"You're makin' good the sayin' that a sailor has a wife in every port aint you Buster?" continued the man who in the absence of better employment delighted in teasing his partner.

"Wife be blowed! What's got into you to-night? Go along to bed!"

"Thank you I'm there," mockingly from the other, while tumbling into his bunk in the cabin corner, and pulling away at his smudgy cob pipe after retiring.

The two men understood each other. "Buster", as he was nicknamed, was shameless. He respected neither God nor man. Whatever he willed to do, he did, regardless of results, and was well known in Alaska by the white inhabitants. The other was a trifle weaker though not less wicked. He could stand beside Buster and urge him on, while hesitating to do the same acts of lawlessness. There is small difference in these degrees of sinning. If any, it may be in favor of the Busters, who possibly deserve credit for fearlessness where the others are cowardly.

The scant mock marriage was soon over.

The smiling little bride said good-bye to her people, who wept around her; climbed into the dog-sled of her new master, and rode proudly away southward.

With the summer her friends might come on a fishing trip to visit her, and renew their acquaintance in her new home.

She wanted to convince them of the wisdom of her selection. She felt that she could do so—if not now, then by the time of their coming.

Poor child! She had not yet learned that it is best to feel confident of nothing.

Two years passed, and a small, black-eyed toddler kept Estella company. He wore a red calico cap upon his head and his stout and chubby limbs grew perceptibly. While young he was tied upon his mother's back beneath her parkie, a stout leather belt confining the same around the woman's waist to prevent the baby from falling out. There his black eyes winked and blinked above the little, round mouth which had only lately learned to smile, and which was beginning to experiment daily among the difficult mazes of his native dialects. For the child was confronted with two languages; Eng-

"Upon his mother's back
beneath her parkie"

lish, spoken by his father, the Eskimo spoken by his mother; but he was as yet ignorant of both. Dearly his mother loved him, and enjoyed his companionship during the long and frequent absences of his father.

Gold in great quantities had now been discovered on the Seward Peninsula. Hundreds of people were flocking into the country. Camps were filling with eager fortune-seekers, and the beach was strewn with tents.

Fur traders had gone into mining. Miners were scattered over the country, carrying supplies by boat up stream to the sections where they looked for gold, and where, in many instances, they found it.

The attention of all had been drawn to a stream called Anvil, near the sea, whose sentinel rock, perched upon a tall hillcrest near, had long and successfully guarded its wealth of gold and treasure.

It could be hidden and guarded no longer. Men now labored strenuously with pick and shovel in the bed of the golden stream; nor stopped for sleeping; while accumulating riches filled their vaults to overflowing.

In a small hut upon the beach lived the Eskimo woman and her boy. Her husband

had sailed with others for the north country, and the two were unprovided for and alone. With industrious fingers Estella made small trifles to sell to the white people in camp, many of whom carried heavy purses and coveted the souvenirs made by the natives.

It was her only way of earning a poor subsistence for herself and boy. Her father and brothers supplied her with fish in summer and her wants were not numerous. Like worn out footgear which had served its purpose, being perhaps well fitting and useful for a time, but after fresh purchases to be cast aside as worthless, was the native woman now discarded.

It was summer time in Alaska. Tundra mosses were at their freshest, and wild flowers bloomed and nodded on every side. It was the time for fishing, and Estella's relatives came to take her with them on their annual excursion, when for a time she was happy trying to forget the white man's neglect. It was better than his abuse and curses which she had meekly borne; but which still sorely rankled in her bosom. Her parents did not upbraid her. They appeared to have forgotten the girl's pride on her wedding

day, and had only kind words for their sad-hearted daughter in her trouble. But sympathy alone could not put food in her mouth nor that of her boy, and winter was approaching.

Her parents had many children, and others depended upon them, and little with which to feed them. The fishing season had been a poor one. Nets and seines had been placed in streams as usual by the Eskimo, but many of these had been destroyed by white men, and where this was not the case the waters of creeks and rivers had been so muddied by mining operations as to ruin all chances of securing fish.

* * * * * * * *

It was a cold and wintry night. The snow was sifting over the tundra in icy gusts from the westward. Morning would see all snow-hidden, including the huts of the four remaining natives on the sandspit between the river and the sea.

Estella's camp fire was dead. There was neither sticks nor coals to feed it. A long-drawn wail from her boy lying huddled in skins upon the ground, reminded her of other deficiencies—there was nothing to eat

in the igloo—absolutely nothing. Both were cold and hungry.

Wrapping herself and her little boy as warmly as possible, she took the child's hand and started down the street of the mining camp in the blizzard. There were places open to her. There were the saloons. They were at least filled with warmth and brightness, and she would there be safe from freezing till morning. There were undoubtedly other dangers, but these she could not now contemplate. She could not let her baby freeze while starving.

Making her way along with her boy between the winter blasts, the little one clinging tightly to her hand, she approached the door.

Lights were shining brightly through the windows, and she heard voices. Would she meet her husband if she entered? She hoped not, for she must go in. It was death to remain outside. Timidly she placed her hand upon the door and partly opened it, glancing quickly about the room to note its occupants.

The flaring of the lamps indicated her presence.

"The little one clinging tightly
to her hand she approached the door"

"Shut the door, you beggar!" shouted the bartender. "Don't you know the wind is blowin' and lights will go out? Besides its deuced cold night, and coal costs money, you know, Stella," added the fellow less savagely, as, glancing quietly at him, and leading her boy, she slowly moved toward the big coal stove.

"Let 'em warm themselves, can't you?" exclaimed one of the men sitting at a table and shuffling cards for a game.

"Whose hinderin' 'em? I aint! All I'm objectin' to is the length of time she held the door open when she came in."

"Wal, she's in now, and the door's shut, aint it?" drawled the card player.

"Yes."

"Then close your gab!" and lowering his tone to his partner opposite he said shortly, "Play, wont you?"

In the meantime Estella was warming herself beside the fire. On her knees she held the boy whose head soon drooped drowsily in spite of his hunger.

It was a long, bare room, newly boarded as to ceiling, flooring and walls. A smooth and shining counter stretched along the west

side of the room, behind which stood rows of well filled bottles, ready to be uncorked. For ornament, upon the opposite wall there hung a great mirror, trying its best to duplicate the owner's stock in trade, as though he would be needing such help before the winter was over, when his whiskies were gone. For further brightening the room there hung suspended from gilt buttons close below the ceiling, certain representations of personages in garments too filmy to assure the observer that they were intended for this Arctic world, because rivalling the costumes of two solitary gardeners in the long ago.

However that may be, the pictures did not disturb Estella—as to the miners they were accustomed to these and many other sights. Something far worse to her troubled the Eskimo. It was hunger.

Suddenly one of the loungers, considerably younger that the others, said to his neighbors:

"I'll bet she's hungry."

"Very likely, Sam, they mostly always are. There's nothin' here to eat if she is, by George."

"There's plenty of booze!"

"Yes, at two bits a drink."

"Then straightening himself in his seat the first speaker called out:

"Stella!"

"What?" answered the woman in a low voice.

"Are you hungry?"

Quick as thought she raised her head and looked appealingly into his face.

"Yes." Her lips trembled, and tears sprang into the dark eyes.

"Have you had anything to eat to-day?"

"No—little fish yesterday," she said quietly, holding up one finger to indicate the number.

"Good God! She's starving! Here, you toddy slinger, there! I say, can't you give this woman something to eat?" to the man behind the bar.

"Wal, I'm sorry to say it, but there aint no grub here; leastwise that's good for Eskimo," he added with a wink.

"I guess most anything would be good for her, and you hand out something real sudden, too," said the young man, tossing a bright silver dollar toward the counter.

"Oh, wal', if that's the game, I'm here.

Oyster cocktail and crackers, eh, Stella?"

The woman's eyes brightened at the last words, which she understood; the first she was a stranger to, but if it was something to fill the awful void beneath she could eat it. She nodded eagerly.

Beggars could not be choosers. That was never plainer than now. Cocktail and crackers soon disappeared, a good share of the latter going underneath the woman's parkie to keep for her boy when he awaked. The cocktail he must not have.

An hour later a few of the miners played on. Some, whose well filled "pokes" permitted had gone to warm and comfortable beds, others to cold and cheerless bunks, as the case happened; but the Eskimo woman, with her sleeping boy on her lap, slept heavily. Sitting on the floor in a corner, with her head against a bench, she had for a time forgotten her sorrows.

Presently the door was partly opened, and an Eskimo slipped softly inside. The men were still intent on their "black jack", and he was unnoticed. His anxious face perceptibly brightened when he saw Estella, and he gave a deep sigh of relief as he seated

himself near the fire.

There was a lull between games at the green table.

"Say, boys, what's become of Buster?" asked one of the miners.

"Gone to the devil, I guess. That's where he was goin' the last time I saw him," remarked one in no uncertain tone of voice.

"Oh, no, he's married a white woman," exclaimed the youngest of the party.

"Ha, ha! That's a good 'un. My lad, I'm older'n you, and I tell you it may be as you say and still not alter the case of his goin' to the old boy. Some women I know of help a man faster that way than t'other," said the old miner.

"Buster's a chump! Just look at all the money he's made off the natives and see the way he treats 'em!" jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the two asleep in the corner.

"And that kid of his'n. He ought to take care of him instead of lettin' him starve to death like this. I swear its a shame!"

"Yes, he ought to," from another of the group, "but he wont."

"When I was a kid I was told that a bird

what can sing and wont sing should be made to sing, and that fits Buster now."

"Oh, well, Alaska's a big place, and there's plenty of natives. It don't matter if a few does die off. There'll be enough left, I reckon," carelessly remarked a man who had not spoken.

"You go 'way back and set down, Tenderfoot; you've allers got a pimple on yer nose! Don't you s'pose that Eskimos feel or sense things? I do. I think that such people as this, 'Stella now, orter be looked after,—'specially with that boy of her'n, for he's a likely kid, and might make somethin'. Wonder why the big guns at Washington don't try a hand at helpin'? Seems to me they could if they'd a mind." The man ended his speech in a lower tone of soliloquy.

"Easy to tell others what ter do, aint it, boss?" queried one.

"I s'pose that's so; but I was thinkin' of my own woman and kids at home, and how I'd feel to see 'em starving!" Then as though regretting the turn the conversation had taken, he reached for his furs, and while pulling his parkie over his head preparatory to leaving, said more briskly: "I'm goin'

to bed, boys; you better do the same; it's near mornin'," and with that he left the saloon.

Presently the little boy stirred and whimpered. Instantly the mother roused herself, though with some effort, and the crackers were brought to light. The child was ravenous, and ate greedily. When he had finished the Eskimo by the fire came toward them, saying a few words softly in his own tongue. With that the boy put out his arms and the man took him, going back to his place by the fire.

The woman had changed her position, and was soon again asleep.

When daylight came, the bartender began moving about. He thought the natives had better get into the fresh air, as he wanted to clean the place, he said.

With that the two Eskimos plodded out through the snowdrifts; the man carrying the child in his arms.

The blizzard had died away, and the air was still and cold. When they reached the woman's door they entered, the man first pushing away the snow with his feet, the child still cuddling in his arms.

Beside the camp stove lay piled a heap of small driftwood sticks and a sack of coal. Upon the table a few eatables had been deposited, evidently some hours before. A fire was soon crackling, and a meal was cooking. To the woman's questions the man had not replied. He might have been a deaf man, for all the notice he had taken. She still questioned, speaking their native dialect. When all was done he came close, took her hand in his own, and, speaking in Eskimo, said feelingly:

"My little sweetheart, wont you let me love you now? Many long and weary moons have I waited until my heart is very sore. Tell me if you cannot love me? I will be very good and you shall never starve. I will work. I will bring much driftwood. I have salmon and tomcod, and a dog-team of the best. In summer we will sail for Tubuktulik and make a pleasant hunting camp. There we will shoot squirrels and the big bear, and you shall again be happy with freedom."

At this effort of long speaking the Eskimo seemed abashed, for he was a man of few words usually; but he still clung to the little hand of the woman by his side.

"And my boy?" she whispered eagerly, with tears shining in her eyes, which were now looking unreservedly into his own.

"He shall be mine, and I will ever love him," was the reply, as she glanced proudly toward the baby amusing himself with the sticks.

"You are gentle to Stella, and she will do all things as you say," murmured the woman softly, with drooping head, and trembling.

"And will you love me always, little one?" putting his arms about her and pressing her close to his heart.

"Yes, always and forever. Then I will not be alone," she smiled brightly through her tears at the prospect, while nestling closer in his strong arms.

"Never alone again, dear one. I promise, if your heart will only love me," said he, kissing her; and the child at play among the driftwood sticks gravely gave a handful to his mother.

"He shall call you his papa," said she almost gaily, "for will it not be true?"

CHAPTER VI

WHY MIDAS FAILED

IT was in the Fall of the year 19—that a party of miners outfitted in Nome and started for the Arctic. One of them had been in that vicinity before, was familiar with the trails, and had some acquaintance with the natives of that section.

Like all real "sourdough" miners they knew how to speak a good many words in Eskimo, especially young Gibbs, who had wintered there.

Not only did it please the natives to have the white men use the Eskimo language because it showed friendliness, but it made bargaining easier for all.

It was not, however, for the purpose of trading that this party of five men were making a long, cold and tedious trip to the Selawik River.

They were looking for gold. It was late in November when the creeks and rivers were frozen, and the swamps and tundra

could be everywhere crossed; and as the weather was not so severe as it would be later, and the snow was not so deep it was considered the best time of the year for starting the expedition.

There were three dog-teams and as many heavy sleds, packed tightly with all manner of necessary equipments—fur sleeping bags, tents, clothing of skins, and food supplies in the smallest possible compass, besides frozen tomcod for the malamutes.

To be sure, reindeer would have been more expeditious, and would have hunted their own provender, thus lightening the loads on the sleds, as well as making a delicious food for the men in case of a shortage of provisions; but there were none of these animals at Nome and the dogs were substituted.

It was a long journey. The prospect was one of great hardship and even suffering to those not accustomed to a miner's life; but to these hardy men of Alaska, inured as they had been to the cold of this northland, it was a real pleasure trip which was looked forward to with keenest interest.

The direction they wished to take was due

northeast from Nome to the Selawik River; and at that place their plans would be further perfected. Their object was to find virgin gold—placer gold—to discover it in such quantities that all might become rich; and incidentally, after their own wants had been supplied, those of the gentlemen whose money had outfitted them would be considered—perhaps.

They were already on the trail, at any rate, with all they needed upon their sleds and in their pockets; the gentlemen in question were far away—too far to interfere with their movements; in fact, had gone to London for the season and could not return for many months.

This was their opportunity. They proposed to use it for their own advantage unless prevented by some unforeseen calamity which should end their lives; at least, this was the way two of the miners expressed themselves in the little roadhouse at Keewalik after many days of hard travel from Nome.

Drinks and tobacco were passed over the counter. Goodbye greetings were being exchanged.

"Hope you'll strike it rich and let us in on the ground floor, Dunbar," called out one of the loafers to the oldest man of the party about to leave.

"Thanks, awfully; I'll remember," replied the man addressed, laughing, but without promising. "So long!"

"So long," called out the bartender in reply. Then to those in the room: "Them fellers are hittin' the trail in good shape with all they need for six weeks, but when that's gone they'll have ter come to us to fill up again. There aint no other place this side of Nome to buy a hunk of terbac that I knows of, eh, Curley?"

"Nope, nor drinks, nor grub neither, by Jove!" removing the smutty cob pipe from between his teeth in order to smile widely as was habitual with Curley.

"I wish 'em much joy with that Selawik gang," said the man behind the bar.

"Well, there's a few whites there, and then there's ole Kuikutuk and his brood, besides a dozen other natives. Does the ole shaman's squaw still live in his igloo?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so. She did the last I heerd," answered the other.

"Ole Kuik better look sharp when Gibbs gits there, for I have heerd that the young fool was awful sweet on his pretty woman last year," and wide smiling Curly pulled his parkie hood over his head preparatory to leaving the roadhouse, after delivering himself of this piece of gossip.

"Them chaps is swelled up now all right enough, but just wait a bit. They may come back with their feathers picked, for the job they've struck aint a summer picnic, and that's no josh, either."

In this manner were the departed miners and their actions commented upon; not in the most complimentary way, to be sure, as is the custom with many when those around them seem prosperous.

In the meantime the prospectors pushed on. Lakes, rivers and mountains were crossed. In the latter the lowest passes and the most used trails were selected, but these were always rough and bewildering at best—a few blazoned spruces on the hills or hatchet-hacked willows near the creeks, a tin can placed upon a stake or a bit of rag flying from a twig; all these but poorly marked the paths which were seldom pressed by the

foot of a human being. Weeks might elapse, or months even, when no soul passed that way. Perhaps the whir of a partridge's wing as he flew from one feeding ground to another on the tundra was the only sound disturbing the still air for hours; or when a red fox, made sprightly by hunger, left as few foot-prints on the snow as possible, by leaping with great bounds forward to the hills.

Buckland River and its tributaries were left behind. No gold of any account had as yet been found in their vicinity, and the miners hurried on. Time was precious, for food was disappearing and severe weather was approaching.

Finally, at the close of a short winter's day in December, the three dog-teams drew their sleds into the camp at Selawik. Flinging themselves upon the snow in their harness the patient brutes looked appealingly into their masters' faces. Then, as if by instinct they understood that here they would stop for some days, tense and tired muscles relaxed, each pointed furry head was laid between two weary little feet, and the malamutes rested. They had well earned the rest.

Here in the midst of a forest of small firs the boughs of which were still covered with snow as if it had just fallen, rose the chimneys of perhaps a half dozen log cabins and igloos, the latter appearing to be simply burrows from which smoke was slowly issuing; but being in reality the winter homes of the Selawik Indians or Eskimo.

The latter usually lived in filth and squalor, it being their habit to perform only the most necessary labor, and that, too, with the least amount of effort. The women were the workers, performing the major part of every duty.

In the igloo of the shaman, or medicine man, however, it was different. The old native had lost his first wife and married another and younger one, the pretty woman spoken of by wide-mouthed Curley in the Keewalik roadhouse some days before. She was a full blooded Eskimo, as was the shaman, but had enjoyed the advantages of travel, having visited in the Nome country; remaining for a time also in the mission house at Kotzebue.

Among the Selawiks she was accounted a beauty. Her cheeks were rosy though high-

"The pretty woman . . . was a full-blooded Eskimo"

boned, her skin dark but clear, and her lips, not too full for symmetry, repeated the tint of her cheeks artistically. She was fond of weaving bright bits of color into the two long braids of black hair, and decorating in many different ways her fur parkies and mukluks. She was proud of keeping her house and person as tidy as possible, while her versatility allowed her the use of many English words and sentences.

It was not long after his arrival in camp the year before, that the young prospector and miner, Gibbs by name, began looking upon the wife of the old shaman, Kuiktuk, in a way that boded trouble for someone.

The old Eskimo was not slow to perceive it. It was not his custom to talk much, but he was often, though silent, an intensely interested observer of the white man who so often came to his igloo.

The shaman's wife flirted. Then the shaman sorrowed. Like a philosopher he bore his trouble for some months until the spring came, the snow and ice left the Selawik, the young white man's supplies were low, and he was finally seen poling his small boat down the river to the Kotzebue, appar-

ently leaving forever.

Then Kuiktuk took courage, picked up the broken ends of his matrimonial cable, and putting them together as best he could, devoutly hoped he had seen the last of the youthful lover.

Now, after a year, he returned. Not only so, but he had brought others with him who might aggravate the situation; and the old Eskimo's heart was sore. Gibbs and his men had made for the shaman's igloo soon after their arrival in the camp. What would happen next?

He knew their object. They were searching for gold, guided by the man he hated but whom his wife loved. She and her former admirer were already renewing their acquaintance of the year before, to the sorrow and mortification of the shaman.

The men had brought trading tobacco, tea and coffee, with which to gain favor with the Eskimos while they talked of the unknown country about them, its possibilities and probabilities. Did the natives know of gold in this region? Had they seen the shining metal in any of the nearby creeks or rivers during the summer? Had there been re-

ports from neighboring tribes of any such discoveries?

These and many like inquiries were made by the men, but were answered in the negative.

The shaman kept silent.

This was finally noticed by Gibbs, who immediately imagined that here was the only source from which the desired information could be gained.

Kuiktuk had intended it so.

In his corner of the igloo he had ruminated long and earnestly. Three days had the miners already spent in the camp of the Eskimos, and unless they were encouraged in their own way—that is, unless they were given the explanation they sought, they might remain here a month longer; which stay would doubtless bring greater disgrace to the shaman's household than ever; the sooner they were told where to find the gold the better for all concerned; when they would again take to the trail, and he would be left in the undisputed possession of his Selawik wife whom he loved.

"Cow-cow" and calico were kept in store for the natives (the white men said) who

would point the way or guide them to a spot rich in the desired mineral; and who needed these things more than he and his family, reasoned Kuiktuk.

It was really no matter if the gold creeks were omitted altogether; he should by good rights have the cow-cow and calico. There were reindeer skins which had been secured the year before by Gibbs, but which he had forgotten to pay for; and lastly, there were damages which should be settled, for had not the young miner stolen his wife's affections and well nigh broken his heart?

Thus Kuiktuk continued to reason. He was not revengeful by nature; he could easily have slipped a deadly draught into the drinking cup of the man, but he had no wish to kill. He only thought to send Gibbs away about his business in order that his own peace of mind might be left undisturbed. To be sure, he might return to Selawik unless entirely put out of the way, but that risk would have to be borne.

Gold-bearing creeks and rivers were little thought of by the Eskimos. Their use for gold was small. Given an igloo, a boat, fishing and hunting tackle, and they were

happy and satisfied; but the white man should be taught to let the wives of the Eskimos alone, and that, too, right early.

All this, and a great deal more, passed through the mind of the shaman.

On the evening of the third day after the arrival of the miners, while all sat smoking before the fire, Kuiktuk decided to act.

Taking his pipe from his mouth he pulled himself slowly together as if about to speak.

"Say, Kuiktuk, old man, what is it? Can you tell us where to find the yellow stuff we look for?" keenly inquired Dunbar.

The Eskimo slowly nodded.

"Is it far from here?"

A shake of the head in reply.

"How far? Where?" eagerly asked the men in a breath.

He pointed in a southeasterly direction.

"How many sleeps?" inquired Gibbs, meaning to ask how many days' journey it was.

Kuiktuk held up the fingers of one hand.

"He says its a five days' 'mush' from here," interpreted Gibbs.

"Will you go with us to the place?" from Dunbar.

"Me want cow-cow ameluktuk," mumbled the medicine man slowly.

"Yes, yes, you shall have the cow-cow," impatiently cried Dunbar, "but not until you show us the place."

"Me want cow-cow ameluktuk," again muttered the man, still slowly but more firmly.

"Oh, he wants the grub before we leave," said Gibbs.

"The devil he does!" cried another, who then tried to explain to Kuiktuk that he must produce the gold-bearing creek before he was given the food in payment.

The native was obstinate.

"Cow-cow peeluk, gold peeluk," indifferently, from the medicine man, going back to his pipe in the corner as if not caring for further conversation.

"He means no grub, no gold—or we must give him the supplies first, else we don't get the creek," again interpreted Gibbs.

"To the dogs with the fellow!" cried one.

"He wants the whole cheese."

"Let him keep his creek and be—blessed!"

"Forget it, boys, and come to the Kobuk with me," laughed one.

"Let's give him the calico and beads, but cut out the grub," finally from one of the most generous, while Kuiktuk sat stolidly smoking.

The latter would not compromise. The men hated to part with the supplies, but dreaded far worse to lose the prospect of that good creek said by the native to contain gold. It might prove another Anvil, who could tell? Possibly it was not so far away as the fellow said, Eskimos were never well up in time and distances, and knew nothing of prospectors' methods.

This was what Dunbar argued, and he, being the eldest of the party, was finally allowed his way, and that was to pay the shrewd trader his price, delivering to him the supplies agreed to on the next day before they started out upon their stampede to the creek.

"Then in case the old fellow has lied about the gold," said Gibbs, "we'll hang him to the nearest tree."

A consultation of miners, including Kuiktuk was held. Plans for the trip were laid, the route selected and all preparations completed. The shaman would lead the men up

the Selawik River to its head waters, as the trails on the ice, though poor, were level and much better than across the country, where mountain ranges intercepted. They would then head due south.

Only this much of his plan did the old Eskimo reveal. Secretly he wished to lead the men by ways they could not possibly traverse in returning. In doing the latter they would not wish to break a new trail unguided through an unexplored region of such magnitude, and by spring the ice would be leaving the Selawik.

As they had no boats it would be impossible for them to return as they had come. If they came to Selawik during the summer, he, and his family and friends would be away on their annual fishing excursion and their igloos would be deserted.

Thus the Shaman planned before the start was made for Midas.

The weather was not severe and signs were propitious for "mushing". The men were clothed in reindeer skins, with sleeping bags of the same material; their dogs were fresh, and they themselves were well fed and rested.

A hundred miles or more were as nothing to them as compared to the trip from Nome.

At last the head waters of the Selawik were reached under Kuiktuk's guidance. No white man had they seen. A few Eskimo huts were passed; game was more abundant, and as they came into heavily wooded country with guns and ammunition they supplied themselves with ptarmigan and other winter fowl of various kinds. Then they hoped to kill a caribou or reindeer which would furnish food for the malamutes as well as for themselves.

By this time three of the party hung back. With the Eskimo guide they numbered six. To penetrate still farther into an unknown wilderness at this season with an insufficient food supply would be foolhardy; it would be better for them to return to Nome by the shortest trail and again secure provisions.

This course was finally adopted.

Dunbar and Gibbs, accompanied by their guide, one day longer, were to push on as speedily as possible to the wonderful creek, while the others would return to Nome. Here they were to rest quietly until the two had made fast their stakes on Midas, and

also returned to the city for supplies. In the meantime, the ones to reach the latter place first were to give out the news of the discovery of a magnificent new section, the center of which was a gold-bearing creek of amazing richness. Here was a chance to excite the credulity of the people of Nome, than whom there were none more willing and anxious to learn of new and rich gold discoveries; and the possibility occurred to the miners that money with which to prospect the new Midas might be collected from the citizens.

With this understanding the men parted; Kuiktuk remaining with Dunbar and Gibbs for another day, when, giving them full and explicit directions as to the route to the creek, as well as a complete description of the same, he started back to his own camp.

Again the two men pushed southward.

"We're up against it now, Dunbar," laughed Gibbs, "and its a question of who'll win out. If it hadn't been for the old rascal's appetite we would have made Kuiktuk come the entire way to Midas; but he lowered our grub so fast it was no use."

"No, but be sure you don't lose his rude

map and directions to Midas in your notebook. Without them we would indeed be up against it, as you say," replied the older man, seriously, as they were making their way across the big "Divide" when the native had left them.

Snow was now beginning to fall in large flakes; a storm signal, and one they liked little. The temperature was falling. It was quite dark at three o'clock in the afternoon, and they were obliged to travel by snow-light. When camp was finally made, after halting for the night in a thicket of pine and spruce trees, the men were cold, tired and hungry.

Close under the branches of the pine trees they pitched their little tent for shelter. A big fire of logs and branches was kindled in front. The weary malamutes and their masters had eaten, and lay stretched upon the ground, the men in sleeping bags, thrown upon boughs from the thicket; the dogs upon the snow near the fire.

The latter was to be replenished during the night from the pile of sticks just gathered, and the animals would act as sentinels in

case a wolf or bear happened to stray that way.

Oh, the loneliness of that winter's night; they were surrounded by a sheeted wilderness, how far from human habitation they did not know. No moon or stars gave light to cheer the wanderers, but instead, snow falling heavily and noiselessly over all. No winds stirred among the pines, causing them dead silence. The one solitary sound to be heard at intervals was the snapping in the fire of some pine knot, long since broken and dead upon the ground, or clipped from its parent stem by the axe of the prospector.

When the storm had cleared and the two miners were able to look about them sufficiently, they discovered the creek described by Kuiktuk.

It lay between high hills, locked in the icy grip of an Arctic winter. On the southern exposure of these hills grew fir, pine and spruce trees of no great size, but still invaluable to prospectors in this otherwise inhospitable region. Had it been in summer time one could have seen a narrow and sinuous creek flowing in a northeasterly direction, emptying itself into a much larger and more

sinuous stream which trended easterly and united with the great Koyukuk.

There were but a few low-lying "benches" to be found. The hills were everywhere. They sprang from the earth like mushrooms in a moist garden. Their summits were rock-ribbed and sides boulder-strewn.

Worse than all else the rock was granite. No miner of experience in this country hoped to find gold in a granite section; it had never been known to accompany such a formation in Alaska, and these men well knew that they were check-mated.

There was no gold there.

They had been duped. When further investigation had confirmed the truth of their first fears the rage of these men knew no bounds. Gibbs, especially, raved like a madman, and swore dire vengeance on the native who had been the cause of their disappointment.

It was all clear to his mind now. The old man whom he had thought so docile and inoffensive as he sat in his igloo corner smoking his pipe, was in reality not what he appeared, but a being like other men, having the same sensibilities and passions. There

was no doubt now that he had felt the greatest resentment to the young man's course in regard to his wife, and had quietly plotted against him with this result.

Dunbar was angered that he, an innocent man, should have been made the scapegoat for the shortcomings of his companion; declaring that in doing this Kuiktuk had overreached himself. If he had wanted to punish Gibbs he should not have selected the whole party of five to wreak his vengeance upon in this manner, not knowing when they left Selawik that three of their number would return so soon to Nome. The three latter were in reality as much dupes of the old native as they themselves, for had they not gone on to town to spread the news of the splendid gold discovery?

From this standpoint the matter was reasoned upon by the two men sitting before their camp fire, and ended as usual in an explosion of violent wrath on the part of the young miner.

"Oh, quit your cursing, Gibbs," at last exclaimed the older man, ill-naturedly, "and let's decide what can be done. I have a plan which I will unfold to you if you can stop

swearing long enough to listen."

"What is it?" moodily asked Gibbs.

"Let the boys go on to Nome and tell as many big yarns as they like about this rich old creek. When we get there we'll go them one better and make the eyes of the Nomites stand out in wonderment. We will then collect money from as many persons as we can successfully hoodwink into believing our stories and then skip back to the Koyukuk. When the ice has left the rivers we can change our currency into gold dust at some trading post and quietly leave for the 'outside'. Afterwards, if we wish, we can carry this scheme a point farther and on the outside sell Midas ground to all who are easily gullible. See?"

As the man said this he leaned forward to get a closer view of his listener's face. What he saw encouraged him to proceed.

"What do you say, will you do it?"'

"It is the only honorable way out of the scrape, eh?" laughed the other.

"Honor be d———d!" exclaimed Dunbar. "Will you do this or not?"

"I will."

"Shake!"

The two men then shook hands, sealing a

compact diabolical to the last degree, and without further hesitation started for Nome the next morning.

There was great excitement in Nome. Five miners had returned from the Koyukuk country and given out information of a gold "strike" of exceeding richness. Three of these men had arrived before the others, but all told the same story. A Selawik Eskimo, they said, had recently guided them to the creek where their own discoveries had confirmed his statement. Nothing so rich had they ever before seen. The creek gave promise of being one of the most famous placer gold diggings that had ever been found in Alaska; was in fact a veritable Golconda, and the returned prospectors dilated upon the interesting details of their story with evident enjoyment. They stated that the formation of the country was the very best for gold indications; that the creek was wide and shallow, the benches were broad, and the hills few in number but long and sweeping like the famous hills of Solomon and Anvil.

The two miners went further. While expatiating to their listeners upon the extent of the possible and probable contents of their

new creek, each man exhibited with much gusto a medium-sized "poke" partly filled with coarse gold and nuggets which they had panned (they affirmed) from the gravel bed of the stream after cutting away the ice sufficiently; and with these and other plausible tales were the good people of Nome for weeks entertained.

To their three companions Dunbar and Gibbs gave no hint regarding their actual experiences at Midas.

The secret was safer with two than five; but five men could arouse greater interest and raise more funds for their schemes. For this reason the two leaders kept their own counsel, but urged the spreading of the false reports.

Money soon began to flow into their pockets. Everyone wished to have a hand in this wonderful "strike", and all were willing to pay for such interests. Not only did mining men go into their bank books, but clerks, stenographers, and small tradespeople passed out their hard-earned money. Women also felt reluctant to be left behind at a time of such wondrous opportunity, and plunged their hands into all sorts of nooks and cran-

nies for their long hoarded but smaller denominations.

* * * * * * * *

A few months and the scene was changed. Two miners poled their small boats down the Koyukuk River. Winter was gone, taking ice and snow with it. Instead of these, the waters of the great river, fed by melted snow and tributaries, surged on mightily, now whirling in swift rapids where huge boulders impeded their progress; or to lower levels where green islands caused a division of the floods allowing reunion later.

The men in the boat talked little.. They managed to drift past the principal mining camps during the night in order not to be much seen. To be sure, there was no darkness at this time of the year, but the camps were not stirring much through the night; and in the event of a near approach to a trading post in daylight they rested a few hours among the willows on the river banks or upon some island in mid-stream. When they had slept and eaten before their camp fire their journey was resumed.

In the bow of the boat lay two sacks of very great weight. They were not large, but

were made of strong, thick material, such as is used for tents. Great care was given these sacks by the two men. At every halt along the river they were carefully lifted out upon the ground above the reach of the water, and covered by some article of clothing or bedding.

The sacks contained gold.

The men had come from Nome to the Koyukuk, where at a small trading post they had changed a large amount of currency into gold dust and nuggets, mined from adjacent creeks. With this they were making their way south to the Yukon River where they intended to go quietly on board a steamer heading up stream, thus making their way to the Klondyke and later to the States.

Reaching the Yukon River, a small steamer was hailed; they boarded her and soon smoked contentedly on deck in the sunshine.

"Are you going on to 'Frisco' as you first thought of doing, Dunbar?" inquired Gibbs, for these were the two Midas Creek promotors.

"You bet I am, and you go, too, for you are pledged to the scheme to the end, you know. You won't back down now, will you?"

with some anxiety the question was asked by Dunbar.

"I couldn't with honor, old man, could I?" and the young miner laughed, tossing a handful of gold nuggets up in the air and carelessly catching them as he spoke.

"There you go again!" said the other, "If I were you I would cut out all the small talk about honor after this. It isn't consistent."

"Agreed, but one likes to hear oneself mention the word occasionally as a reminder that there is such a thing. Then, too, if one chanced to be overheard it might make a good impression on somebody," winked the fellow slyly.

"I never thought of that to be sure. You may be young in years but you're not in wickedness. I believe you'll do. If you're not afraid it will injure that blessed honor of yours, go fetch another bottle of the best champagne from the bar, will you?"

"You bet I will. I'll get two of them while I'm getting," and Gibbs sauntered away with his hands in his pockets after tossing his cigarette over the steamer rail.

When Gibbs returned he was followed by a waiter who carried a tray with bottles and

glasses. In their wake were others who had quickly responded to the young miner's invitation to drink with them, and they were all presently hilarious.

In this way were the two men scattering the contents of their gold sacks—their's by right of possession only; but really belonging to the townspeople of Nome. Little cared the two men how quickly the gold sacks were empty for they had the ability to replenish them when they liked. They were smooth talkers, told plausible tales, looked one squarely in the eye while speaking, and bore no marks to the casual observer of the rascality underneath.

If people were so easily taken in it was their own look-out, and served them right—this was a much quicker and easier way of mining the creek gold than with pick and shovel—nobody need be poor—"we will soon have money to burn, and might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb;" these were some of the arguments and observations made by the two miners as they proceeded up the river on their way to the "outside" and the scene of their future operations.

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A year passed. In the great Koyukuk country the summer had come again and with it new life and activity in the way of prospectors and settlers. Craft of all shapes and sizes could be seen trying to force their way against the current of the great river. There were scows, houseboats, and small steamers. Families there were on flat boats which appeared to hold the earthly possessions of many. Tents were pitched on scows, and camp stoves with their accompanying smoke stacks peeping through the canvas did full duty. Mining tools formed a large and conspicuous part of the supplies of the incoming prospectors, for they were to exploit a certain rich section of country still in its virginity, and there were no trading posts near.

In the multitude there were men, women and children. There were outfits costing hundreds and even thousands of dollars, but all were full of eager expectancy; for were they not coming to one of the richest gold-bearing sections in Alaska? And had not their funds preceeded them for the purchase of claims soon now to be opened up by them?

It was small wonder that they were light

hearted and worked early and late to get to the desired place. All carried descriptions of the famous creek and its surroundings, and each day eyes were strained in a westerly direction in the hope of catching a first glimpse of the promised land.

They had come from the Nome country, and a dozen different states besides; the Pacific coast being largely represented. They were there by scores from farms, from shops, from colleges, and from the great cities, and all were filled with highest anticipations.

They were looking for the creek called Midas.

They found it.

Dunbar and Gibbs were not there, but the granite mountains were. Many of the first prospectors to ascend the creek left their outfits and poled even farther in small boats. Many miles they toiled between banks so close and around curves so sharp that there was small chance for turning a tiny craft; but on all sides it was the same.

Winding in and out between great boulders of granite which had in some tremendous upheaval of nature been tossed aloft like

snowballs from the hands of a schoolboy, the waters of this creek struggled, icy and sullen.

A tall and distinguished looking gentleman sat in the stern of a boat while his men laboriously poled. He was from London. He had outfitted a party of men in Nome many months before, and had come to find his gold claims.

No staking ground had been done. Close under a clump of pines the remains of a white man's camp in the shape of tin food cans, and broken cob pipes were found; while scattered near were the leaves of an old notebook and rudely traced map.

No further proof was needed. It was the identical creek called Midas by Dunbar and Gibbs.

It was well for them that they were not there.

The heart of Alaska in winter! It is more than pen can describe. Its beauty, grandeur, and immensity are feebly told in words. Snow and ice are everywhere, and that everywhere seems as great as the world. Hills and mountains are here innumerable and majestic; while rivers and creeks unlimit-

ed in number and of untold wealth lie safely locked in Nature's storehouse by Nature's hand. The heavens are glorious! the noonday sun making the whole earth to sparkle with diamonds like the gems on a queen's bosom; followed by hours illumined by a moon so softly and brilliantly beautiful as to appear like the eye of a god.

Fully as wonderful as in her gentler moods but far more terrible is Alaska when the great blizzard rages. There remains then no signs of serenity. Whirlwind follows whirlwind; gales from the ends of the earth blow horribly and with frenzied swiftness, bearing upon their breath the icy points of millions of keen needles which bite like the stings of insects. Flying, sifting, drifting snow, which before formed jewels of such exquisite beauty is now piled mountain high, or sucks itself with savage fierceness through crannies and into deep gorges between high hills, thus creating a fitting accompaniment in the dangerous crevasse.

Into this wilderness, north of the great Circle, and amid conditions like these, one would scarcely hope to find white men penetrating. Probably not from choice would they

enter; certainly by force of circumstances if at all; and these must have been the most desperate. Be that as it may, a small trail of smoke one day made its way aloft from a log cabin half buried in the snow; while a pack of a dozen malamutes played about the door. A pile of logs and sticks of firewood, an axe, a tin bucket, and dog-sleds near, gave undisputed evidence of the presence here of someone besides natives.

Entering the door, a visitor would have been welcomed by two occupants. One of them lay stretched upon his bunk in the corner of the room; the other, a younger man, threw some sticks upon the fire.

They were arguing the question of breaking camp and pushing further eastward.

"If we can reach the Crow Mountains by spring, secure a boat at Rampart House and work along to the Mackenzie River we are all right," and the speaker bent over a map of Alaska spread out before him.

"From there to the coast is an easy matter, and to secure passage on some whaler for Point Barrow will not be difficult; but afterward—"

"Yes, afterward," interrupted the man

upon the bunk, impatiently. "What about afterwards?"

"We will find a way into Siberia or China where we can enjoy our hard-earned gold," with a sarcastic emphasis upon the three last words of his sentence, but laughing lightly.

"There is no reason you should not do this," was the reply, "but with me it is different. I am ill, and daily growing weaker. This isolation and enforced inaction takes the life out of me; my head grows dizzy from much thinking, and I see forms, spectres, and hobgoblins in all shapes and colors," this was said complainingly and in a weakened voice.

"My dreams are so horrible that I dread the prospect of night."

"You're a fool to worry. Keep a stiff upper lip, and all will be well. See, I'm making a checker-board with which we can kill time when we like."

"I'd like to kill the whole of it before it kills me," was the response. "If I only had something to read or something to do. I'm sick of this infernal hole!"

"Ditto here, but what can we do? If we push on eastward now we will probably be

without shelter, and it is a long and tedious job to build a log cabin. With the thermometer at sixty degrees below zero as it is we will freeze to death on the trail."

"Much loss it would be," growled Dunbar.

"Then if we went back to the Koyukuk," continued Gibbs, "we would be sure to run into the arms of some of our numerous mining partners from Midas, which we are in no hurry to do. We are now about half way between the headwaters of the Koyukuk and the Canadian boundary line, and as we are fairly comfortable here, with plenty of game and firewood, and as we are not sure of finding a shelter for our heads if we move now, I think it wise to stay right here for two months longer at least. With our hunting, eating, sleeping and checkers, the time will pass if we wait long enough," and the speaker resumed a lighter tone while trying to encourage the other.

"I suppose you are right, boy, but I detest this kind of a life."

"It's a heap better than being behind bars for a lifetime or feeding buzzards while dangling from the limb of a tree." Then

seeing the horror on his partner's face, he said with a mockingly polite bow, "A thousand pardons, old fellow, for such unpleasant allusions, but I was only seeking to make you more contented for your own good as well as mine."

"I'm tired of it all," sighed the older man wearily.

"Oh, *no,* we're not tired of this, Dunbar," seizing a gold sack from among a heap of them upon the ground in a corner of the cabin and emptying the shining nuggets upon the checkerboard. "These look as good to me as ever, because I can see in them ease and luxury in some beautiful southern clime, where the birds sing sweetly and the flowers bloom unendingly; where we can find sweethearts by the dozen and live like sultans—by Jove, I wish I were there now."

The other groaned aloud. He covered his face with his hands.

"Take it away, take it out of my sight, I tell you. I hate it! I hate it!" he cried hoarsely and with eyes glaring, as he leaped from his bunk to the ground.

The younger man knew that he had gone too far and tried to pacify him, putting the

gold hastily away and covering it from sight.

Afterwards when the older man had grown calmer, the two went for a hunt, followed by three of their dogs for company. The remainder of the malamutes kept watch by the camp in their absence.

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The sun had long since sunk below the western horizon. Following in its wake great banks of luminous clouds swept by, finally culminating in a heavy sheet of haze.

From this gradually sprung broad arches of light to the zenith; while rays of brilliant crimson color ranged themselves perpendicularly from earth to sky, shooting up and down with great velocity and tremulousness. In the zenith these arches slowly widened, their rays multiplying until the whole sky was hidden, and then, deepening in intensity of color, became a veritable sea of blood, flowing steadily westward. Over the vast and snowy Arctic waste this glorious flood of color was pouring until no particle of whiteness remained.

At the close of the day the hunters and their dogs were returning to their cabin after having shot enough small game for some

time.

A solemn stillness had until now prevailed, when suddenly, without warning, there were heard with startling clearness on the frosty air hissing or whizzing sounds, like the crackling of firebrands in a furnace.

With the first appearance of the polaris in the heavens Dunbar became greatly excited, clutching the arm of his companion until he cried out with pain.

"It has come at last! Its the judgment! Its hell, hell! See the blood! See it on my hands—it covers everything. Hell's everywhere!" and the man shrieked, tearing his clothing from him and darting from side to side as if trying to escape some awful fate.

In vain the younger man tried to quiet him.

"The devil's coming! He'll get me! Keep him away!" he cried with curses, and he crouched at the feet of Gibbs, a wild-eyed, and screaming maniac.

At that instant the crackling about their heads became louder, and the older man sprang to his feet in a frenzy of fright.

Leaping, shouting, cursing, flinging out his arms to imaginary assailants, tearing his

beard and his hair by handfuls, he ran to and fro, a raving madman. Then in an insane frenzy he turned his back on his companion for one instant as if about to flee to the woods, when Gibbs, snatching his revolver from his belt, aimed it at the man's back and fired.

Dunbar fell dead upon the ground.

Until that moment the dogs, quite unconcerned at what was going on about them, being intent only upon following their trail of the morning back to the cabin, now fled toward home, howling dismally.

The young miner was now alone; utterly and entirely alone. Above and around him shone the blood-red light from the heavens; at his feet the body of his only friend—dead.

Gibbs fainted.

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The magnificent electrical hurricane of the night before had passed over, leaving behind one faithful sentinel—the moon. Lovingly and brightly her beams were shed over the wilderness of snow whose purity was marred by only two dark blots—the bodies of two men lying dead upon their faces. The first died by the hand of the other. The sec-

ond by freezing. Both were suddenly called to that judgment so horribly feared by the older man, who saw in the unusual display of the aurora polaris the realization of his worst imaginings.

So these two men fell; while the influence of their evil deeds continue like the ripples on a lake surrounding a sinking stone; perhaps forever.

"For I hold it true that thoughts are things
Endowed with body, breath and wings,
And that we send them forth to fill
The world with good results or ill."

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD STONE HOUSE

THE inhabitants of Rainy Hollow were greatly disturbed. In the face of facts there really was justification for such excitement on the part of the miners, the issue at stake being an important boundary line between two great nations. Those loyal to the stars and stripes, and supporting themselves under the protection of their beloved colors, were surprised to hear hinted the possibility of their being placed, against their will, under the jurisdiction of a foreign power, whose hand might easily prove an arbitrary one. Restlessly they agitated the question at their miners' meetings, with a dim hope that some solution of the trouble would present itself, and ultimately they would be left in the happy possession of properties for which they had endured strenuous hardships and from which they would only part when compelled.

From the channel called Portland on the

south, along the coast to the pinnacles of St. Elias, ten marine leagues were supposed from time immemorial to be defined; neither the channel, the salt water line, nor the mountain's top having been materially changed as to configuration. From Mt. Elias a perpendicular line to the Frozen Ocean farther outlined the boundary between the two nations, this not being included, however, in the debatable country at this time.

The question, then, before the miners, resolved itself into one peculiarly simple. It was this: Had the line of demarcation been successfully deflected in order to include the natural seaports of such increased importance since the gold discoveries in the Klondyke? and if so, how? The line was far from being imaginary. In the long, long ago in certain places natural landmarks had been made use of by the Russians, but where they were not available monuments of stone had been erected at intervals, and these built in solid masonry had withstood the encroachments of the elements for more than fifty years.

An old stone monument house built by the Russians almost a century before was yet to

be discovered by those of the "ten leagues" theory, and it must be searched for, but where, and by whom? If this could be found the authenticity of the old boundary line would be established, and those in authority could place their hands without hesitation upon proof which must be decisive.

Finally, one beautiful day in summer, a miners' meeting was called, and the Rainy Hollow men assembled to decide what they could do to assist the government to put an end to the matter forever.

A burly, old-time miner and pioneer called "Dick Dead-eye" by his fellows, was made chairman of the meeting. This name was given him because he was a good marksman, having an eye which seldom failed him in taking aim with a gun. He was seconded by a stranger, who, having a keen, quick glance and well knit figure dressed appropriately in leathern trousers and leggings, sat at the chairman's right and evidently "meant business", as Billy Blue intimated on the aside to his companions.

"This meetin' will now come to order," called out the chairman of dead-shot fame, giving two or three good, hard thumps on the

table with his heavy fist.

As the buzzing in the room ceased and each man gave his attention the speaker continued.

"You fellers all know why we came here to-day. We have with us one of Uncle Sam's men from Washington, D. C. He has been sent by our government to look up the matter of the boundary line between us and the Yukon territory, and see if we can't git things settled rightly."

At this a storm of applause greeted the speaker and along with the clapping of hands was heard the thud of the miners' heavy hob-nailed boots upon the floor in emphasis.

The chairman waited for silence. When it came he said:

"I have the great honor and pleasure, gentlemen, to introduce to you Lieutenant Adams, our friend from Washington. The lieutenant will give us a talk," and with that the chairman took his seat, while wiping away the perspiration incident to the exertion of conducting a meeting in the presence of a man from Washington.

The lieutenant rose quickly, and looking over the little band of miners, briskly ad-

dressed them as one of their number.

"My friends," said he, "you have all had experience in locating mining claims, but we want you to locate something else in order that you may keep possession of the ground you have, and that is the old Russian Boundary Line so long ago established by the first white settlers and traders in Alaska. If we can verify the boundary now held by us as being the one established and held by them, you will be left in the undisturbed right of your property."

"Hear! Hear!" exclaimed his enthusiastic listeners, causing the officer to smile.

"You probably all know that our government bought Alaska from Russia a few years ago at what seemed at that time an enormous sum for a frozen good-for-nothing country. The transaction was designated 'Seward's Folly', and the country was said to be a fit residence only for polar bears and Eskimos. The whale and seal industries were fast reaching extinction when gold was discovered, and this, too, in such vast quantities and widely separated districts as to enormously increase by leaps and bounds the value of the whole of Alaska. For this reason the matter of

the boundary line has grown to be of immense importance, and in justice to our neighbors as well as to ourselves, it should now be authoritatively settled once and forever. What I want to know is, how many of those present will assist me in securing evidence of the old boundary marks. It is a big undertaking. We shall need guides and boats. I understand what it means for miners to leave their work in the busy summer season, but this affair is urgent and cannot be delayed. Will you help me?"

"We will, we will!" cried the men enthusiastically.

"I thank you heartily, and hope we shall soon accomplish our mission," and with that the Lieutenant took his seat.

Great applause followed, and again the cannonading of boots upon the floor was put into action.

The chairman arose and called for order. After a little time, during which the men gave what information they could, it was arranged that Dick Dead-eye should be the Lieutenant's guide into the mountains. The old pioneer was acquainted with Indians on the Klukwan River who had lived in that vi-

cinity for many years, and as he was conversant with the Chilkat language he thought they could get the desired information. The Klukwan River was a tributary of the Chilkat, rising in the mountains which should be their first objective point.

In the late twilight of an Alaskan summer's day the keel of a little boat grated upon the pebbles of the beach at Klukwan. Mission and the west arm of Lynn had been left behind. Here two small rivers emptied their mountain waters into the big Canal whose long, wet fingers persistently pointed toward the Passes and the Golden North. Incidentally, also, they indicated the direction to the disputed Boundary Line, the exact whereabouts of which the pioneer "Deadeye" and his official companion had come to determine. For years the Lieutenant had been engaged by the United States Government in making surveys along the southern coast of Alaska where he was no stranger to the Indians. These knew him, and he spoke their language, as did also the old hunter, trapper and pathfinder.

For two decades had the old hunter forced long trails into the unknown country

and blazed the way for those who were speedily to follow by thousands. To him Yukon and Selkirk were household words.

So their landing at Klukwan was no new experience. In truth a cabin, substantially built of logs and stocked with edibles and other comforts, awaited the two hardy frontiermen. Had there been no such luxuries they would have felt as much at home sleeping beside a camp fire in the open. They looked for those who could tell them of the doings of white men who landed on these shores nearly a century before, and for those who could point the way to boundary monuments wherever they were. Of necessity they must look among the aged ones of Chilkats for information.

On the day following their landing the Indians were assembled, and inquiry was made by the white men as to the location of the boundary monuments. Had any of the people present ever seen such, or did they know where they were to be found?

Two or three then declared that they had seen, many years before, a Russian Boundary House and knew how to reach it; but they were too old to walk so far, or climb the

mountains. They said they would direct some younger Indian, and he should guide the white men to the spot.

Their search, however, proved unavailing. for days they wandered about the mountains and even reached the divide indicated by the old Indians; but nowhere could a Boundary House, or anything of a like description, be found.

At last they returned to Klukwan for supplies and further instructions. There was evidently some mistake.

A consultation was held. An Indian, who had been upon the identical spot of the Boundary House, must accompany the white men and indicate the place, if possible.

Some one mentioned the name of Old Tillie. She was too old to see well, her teeth were long since gone, and she dozed often. No one thought her able to walk any distance; but if she were strong enough she could locate the place, if anyone could. She had been there in her girlhood, seventy years before. When she was asked to guide the white men to the mountains she slowly shook her head but said nothing.

"Well, Dick," said the Lieutenant, "we

When Old Tillie was young

may as well go home. It is too late to do anything more to-day. It is supper time."

Later, when their meal was finished, and tin cups and plates had been put aside, the officer took from its nail an old banjo, and began strumming. Presently he was singing, and his rich, clear voice, admirably suited to the time, place and surroundings, filled the little cabin and floated across to the green where the Indians camped. Song followed song, and the guide continually puffed his pipe near at hand.

By and by, a form stood in the doorway. It was old Tillie. She had heard the music and had hobbled over to the officer's cabin to listen.

"Come in and sit down, Tillie," called out the Lieutenant. "Do you like music?"

She smiled and nodded, accepting his invitation.

"Shall I sing for you, Tillie?"

A low spoken affirmative came from the old creature, who had seated herself near the entrance.

"I'll see if I can remember a few lines in Chilkat that I wrote some time ago," said the musician, as he again touched the strings.

It was only a simple song, descriptive of two Indian lovers, and it ran in this fashion:

In western skies the sun dips low
Above the purpled hills,
While glinting waters and their flow
The air with music fills.

Filmy and light as fairies' wings,
The fading clouds descend,
Touching with finger tips the strings
While leaves on green boughs bend.

The lone loon's call unto his mate
The rustle of the quail,
Announce the day as growing late,
And sunshine's pleasures fail.

Then out upon the quiet lake,
In tiny birch canoe,
Ageeluk and her lover make
Their vows for weal or woe.

In Chilkat tongue the lover sings,
The song all lovers know,
To dusky maid with copper rings,
Where long, lank rushes grow.

The shadows lengthen, slowly creep
  Across the water dark,
While little waves are hiding deep,
  Around the lovers' bark.

Content, at last, these lovers leap
  Upon the steep bank's stone.
The leaves are still, the birds asleep,
  And they are left alone.

When he had finished the song he paused. Tillie seemed fast asleep. She had slipped to the floor at the beginning of the song, and sat with her head upon her drawn-up knees, with her hands clasped above them. She made no move. The officer continued his singing, still softly, and in a retrospective mood. He was a born musician. His whole soul craved song, and the greatest deprivation to him in Alaska was the lack of music. For this reason, he kept his own banjo with him, and many an evening's entertainment had he furnished in cabin and beside camp fire, when his fine barytone mingled with an ascending cloud from burning spruce knots, and added enjoyment to the hour.

At last the old Indian raised her head. Pushing back a few long wisps of hair that had fallen over her face, she asked for water. Her mouth seemed parched and dry, and her withered lips scarcely moved. She had just seen the old stone house they were looking for, and would tell the white men of it, she said.

"Is it the same you saw when a child?" asked the officer.

"Yes, but broken,—the walls stand not. Last moon came men from the north while hunting."

"What did they do?"

"They broke the house,—its walls are down," mumbled the old woman with a scowl.

"*How* were they before, Tillie?"

"Before? Ah, before! In my childhood I saw it,—that Boundary House on the summit. How green the spruce and pine trees, and the nuts that dropped before snow-fall! What fires we made, and the roaring and sweet-smelling! How dear the Indian lovers, and how brave in bear hunting! With teeth of the cinnamon and grizzly we made chains for our necks, and with breasts of water-

fowl we made aprons. In streams we tracked beaver and muskrat, besides mink for our coats in the winter."

"But, Tillie, old woman, what of the white men,—the Russians?"

"Not much white, but dark," she returned, correcting him. "Fine dressing, many knives and guns in belt, buttons bright like money, and they sit on animals, big like caribou, what you call? Yes, horses. Then in boat they sailed to beautiful island. Listen!"

The old creature placed her hand behind her ear as if trying to catch some sound or name. Then, brightening up, she exclaimed: "Baranhoff it is! Big house, fine castle. Beautiful laughing ladies in lovely dressing. Gold, gold, I see everywhere on fingers, ears and necks. Money plenty. All make pleasure, good time, dancing, gambling; drink tea much from big copper dish. Ah, great man many sleeps gone by. This way they dance," then added the old creature, scrambling to her feet clumsily and catching up her tattered skirt daintly with each hand after the manner of a danseuse. Then, still with closed eyes, she glided gracefully and with

dignified movement over the floor in imitation of long dead Russian ladies of high degree.

The Lieutenant strummed a few chords softly upon his banjo, but old Tillie was drowsily crooning her own accompaniment as she swayed backward and forward, and seemed not to notice.

At last, wearied by her unusual efforts, she sank upon the floor in her accustomed attitude and breathed deeply.

"But, Tillie, old woman," urged the Lieutenant, who had not forgotten his important business with the Indians, "what did the men leave in the old stone house on the mountain to tell us they built it?"

"I see iron box and many things in it; kettles, pipes, spoons and a big knife. I see small gun that shoots, and bullets to put in it. Many things are in box, and for it you must dig below the ground, not far, in a corner by the old chimney there; but first you roll the stones away."

"But we cannot find the place unless you show us the way, Tillie. Will you go with us?"

"Yes. Me quick find stone house; but Til-

lie is old, very old, and not much can hurry. She cannot climb mountains like young Indian," and she sighed heavily as she spoke.

"You shall take your own time, only show us to the Boundary House on the Summit, and I will pay you well," said the Lieutenant.

The following day they started. Everything that could be done for the comfort of the Indian woman was done by the two white men. When she was tired she was allowed to rest; and at night a bed of boughs was made for her near the camp fire. Along the banks of the Klahenia she led them, finally leaving the river and following a dry creek bed into the mountains.

Not since she was a little child had she visited this region except in her vision, when she had plainly seen her route and destination,—the ruins of the old stone house on the mountains.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the party reached the desired spot, exactly as old Tillie had described. The Lieutenant and his man found it. Clearing away the huge stones which had formed the walls of the house, they found, upon digging in the

corner, an old iron chest of ancient Russian manufacture. In it were the proofs (if more were needed) that this was the identical Boundary House for which they had been seeking. A couple of small copper kettles, blackened with age and dampness, like the rude knives, clumsy revolver, and bullets for the same, as well as a few old pipes, spoons, and a hatchet, lay as they had done for many years, in the bottom of this old chest. Upon the inside of the latter's lid was inscribed the owner's name—Petrofsky—Russian without a doubt; and a rude drawing which clearly traced the much disputed, much sought out Boundary Line between Alaska and the British Possessions.

On this drawing was shown the very stone house upon the site of which they now stood; and Lieutenant Adams and his companion, threw up their caps for joy.

Pressing the old woman's skinny hand in his own, the Lieutenant filled it with gold pieces, saying as he did so:

"Here is money with which to buy blankets. Take it. You are a wonderful woman, and you shall never suffer. You shall have a warm house and plenty of coal for the win-

ter, and I will see now that you reach your camp safely. You have served us well, and I thank you."

So saying, the white man covered the iron chest, and even replaced the stones above as they had found them. They then returned to Klukwan and their own cabin.

Later, the Lieutenant was successful in gathering information from Indians at Bennett and Tahku, relative to boundary marks and monuments, which was also of great service to him in establishing the fact that the line as it then stood was the one of the original Russian owners, and that no power had authority to change it.

By arbitration between the two countries the matter was finally adjusted, leaving the miners of Rainy Hollow, as well as those of the Porcupine District and other places, in peaceful possession of their lands as they desired; but of those who had given assistance to the United States officials while inquiring into the location of Boundary marks, none had given more satisfactory and timely aid than Tillie, the Chilkat Indian, when she led the white men to the Old Stone House on the Summit.

CHAPTER VIII

A MINER'S OWN STORY

THE woman I loved above all others in this world had been my happy wife for a number of years when we decided to come to hunt for Alaskan gold.

We lived only for each other. Our attachment was very great, a feeling which at the first time of meeting sprang suddenly into existence. My love for my wife was my ruling passion, my ambition for Alaskan gold being always secondary, as were all other earthly concerns.

Her attachment for me was of a like nature, warm and sincere.

My greatest anxiety was her health. Never entirely robust, she had gradually grown less so, even with all my tender care, and as her mind grew and expanded her body became more frail. At last our physician prescribed an entire change of life and scene. As I was not a rich man, and must wherever I went still manage to bring in by business methods enough for our support, it was an important

question with us for some time where we should settle.

Olga (for that was the name of my little wife) wished to go to Alaska. There she thought we could together search for the precious mineral only recently discovered in various places; and though the journey was a long one she argued that the change would be beneficial to her.

So we came to the northern gold fields. Fortune favored us for two years. Our claims were turning out so well that we planned to build a good house in town soon which would be a comfortable home until, after the further growth of our bank account, we could leave the country forever.

Before that time arrived, however, a thunder bolt had fallen—Olga was dead.

I had gone for two days to my claims on the creeks ten miles away, leaving her alone. At night she was to have the company of a woman friend in order that she might not feel lonely, and the following evening I was to be at home again.

How I hated to leave her! Something like an unseen hand upon my arm held me back; but my men were even then awaiting my or-

ders and I was obliged to go. To remain at home now meant a loss of thousands of dollars as the late rains had so swollen the creeks that sluicing was in full blast after many weeks of waiting on account of scarcity of water.

Olga was in her usual health and smiled brightly, standing in the doorway when I pressed my lips to her for a goodbye.

"Don't get lonesome, dear, I'll be back as soon as possible, and bring a good-size poke full of nuggets with me, too," said I hurrying away in the direction of the hills where my claims were situated.

Looking back from the tundra trail which I had been putting behind me as fast as possible for some time, I saw her standing in the doorway looking after me, but whether she had remained as I left her, or whether she had returned to the door after going inside, I never knew.

The next time I saw her she was dead.

I had walked ten miles to my claim and superintended the daily "clean-up" at the sluice boxes, securing as I had said I would a poke full of golden nuggets worth several thousand dollars.

It was a splendid clean-up, but for some

unexplainable reason I was restless and uneasy. I had seen so much gold it was getting to be an old story; or my meals had not digested well; or perhaps I was working too hard—I tried in these ways to account for my indifference. My mind wandered from the work in hand. I looked often in the direction of home and Olga, but the hills were between us. I slept fitfully at night, after waking with a start which disturbed me greatly. At last I looked at my watch. It was past midnight, and I determined to go home.

Going to the creek where the night gang was at work, shoveling into the sluice boxes, I told the foreman I was starting for home, as I believed something had happened.

"You're nervous!" he said.

"I don't care what you call it; I'm going home to see how things are there," and I hurried away toward town.

"Don't worry, Mr. A.", called out the man after me, "Your wife's all right," then in a lower tone to himself, "That fellow'll go daffy over his little wife, as he calls her, if he isn't careful. It's a good thing I haven't any, for I couldn't watch her like that if I did have, that's certain."

I hurried on over the trail, the night being light and clear, the grass dewy, and the sun about to rise; for it was midsummer in Alaska.

Afterwards I remembered these things.

When half way home I saw a horseman coming toward me. He was riding rapidly, and when he drew near I recognized a neighbor. He reined in his horse.

"Good morning, Mr. A.," said he.

"What is it, Peter, tell me quick! Has anything happened at home?" I cried impatiently.

"Mr. A., I am sorry to tell you, but you're"—

"Don't say she is dead! Don't say that!" I begged.

"Mount my horse, and I'll follow. Go as fast as you can for the animal is fresh," said he; but I heard nothing, saw nothing. I was simply clinging to the saddle, as the animal galloped back over the trail.

In a dazed condition I reached home. Our cabin was filled with sympathetic friends, trying to assist in some way. As I came in they dispersed, leaving me alone with Olga.

They had placed her upon a couch where she lay with a sweet smile upon her lips, but

they were cold when I kissed them—her heart had ceased to beat, and for the first time in all our lives there was no answering pressure when I took her hands in mine.

Oh, the agony of that moment! No tongue can tell, no pen describe, the awful loneliness of that hour. She had been part of my life—of me. I could not live without her; I did not want to try.

Oh, God! How could I bear it? What should I do? I had given her my love, my life, and now she was dead—everything was swept away and there was absolutely nothing to live for. If I could only die! Dare I take my own life? No, for that would then mean everlasting separation, as she was doubtless now in the happiest state to which mortals could be assigned. I must try to reach her no matter at what cost. For hours I knelt beside her with her hands in mine, and my cheek beside her cold one.

I was again talking to Olga, as I fondled her face, her hair, her hands.

"Speak to me, my darling," I pleaded, "if only once more. I cannot live without you. Why did you leave me? How could you go without telling me? Surely you did not in-

tend to do it, did you, darling?" Eagerly I watched her face to see her blue eyes open and her lips once more move. Could I bring her back by calling her? It might be so; and then I tried, repeating her name again and again, tenderly, lovingly, oh, so lovingly!

Hours passed thus. The smile on her lips remained. Presently I listened, my arms about her neck and my head upon her breast.

I was quiet now. The awful storm which had well-nigh uprooted my very soul was gradually subsiding. I must be ready to hear her if she should come back with a message.

This I believed she would do. Many times we had talked together of these things, and each had faithfully promised the other to return, if possible, with comfort and assistance from the mysterious beyond in the event of a separation by death.

I could see her now as she looked while speaking, and then I grew calmer immediately.

I would wait.

By and by it came—only two words.

"The letter."

The letter! Where was it? I had not seen it —I had not thought to look for such a thing

because her departure came so suddenly. A burning building close to our cabin, with wind blowing the flames toward her, had caused the fright and heart failure which deprived me of Olga—but a letter! I would search for it.

Among her writing materials I found it. A sealed packet, directed to me in her own dainty Swedish handwriting.

I cannot reproduce it here. It was for my eyes only, and written a week previously; but she said she was expecting soon to be called away. She did not wish to worry me with goodbyes, and in truth there was no need of saying them for she would be as constantly with me as ever, even though I could not always see her. She did not want me to forget her and hoped I could conveniently manage to keep the poor little body (in which she had lived for nearly thirty years) quite close to me where I could sometimes look upon her face.

All this and much more she had written; each letter and word of which comforted me as only Olga knew how to comfort, because she understood my very soul.

We had been made for each other. We were souls twinned in creation by a higher

power than many know; but it had been given us to understand in her lifetime, and now that she had been called away for a season I must bear it as patiently as possible for her sake, and I would. God helping me, I would bear it! And my unreasoning grief should not disturb her quietude.

The day passed.

In the evening a knock at the door brought me back to my objective senses. I had been oblivious to the outside world all day.

"We thought you might like some coffee and supper, and I have brought it to you," said a kind miner, who was also a neighbor.

"Wife and I will come and stay all night here if you will go to our cabin and get some rest."

I thanked him, declining his last offer, but drank the hot coffee. I then asked him if he would go out and secure the use of the adjoining vacant log cabin for me, so that I could immediately move into it.

This he did, returning in half an hour, asking what further service he could render.

I told him I would move all my belongings into the log cabin, leaving Olga here. This was her house, and it was still to be her home.

By midnight this was done. The man had gone home after making me promise to call him when I wanted help.

In Olga's cabin of two small rooms there remained only a stove, a couch upon which she still rested, and an easy lounging chair.

The door at the front I soon padlocked on the outside, and barricaded within, leaving the back door as the only entrance. Next a man was hired to dig a narrow trench about the whole cabin to conduct all surface water away from the lot. During the hours following I busied myself with the receptacle which would contain the still beautiful, but now discarded body, of my darling Olga.

Carefully removing a part of the flooring in the center of the room, I began digging underneath. The ground was frozen. A pick and shovel in my hands found their way into the frost-locked earth and gravel; but at a depth of about five feet I stopped.

Her bed was deep enough; also long and wide enough. Its walls were of ice.

They had dressed her in a robe of pale blue veiling, distinctly suited to her, upon which rested the long braids of her yellow hair, while her only ornament was her wedding

ring upon her finger.

How perfectly serene and happy she looked! I fully expected her to open her lips and speak. When this did not happen, the sense of my awful loss surged back into my brain, seeming almost to take my reason; but another quiet hour by the side of my darling partially restored me.

It was midnight. A perfect storm of grief had just spent itself and left me weak and weary. I threw myself, with a heavy sigh, into the depth of the lounging chair.

Presently I slept. What was that? A bit of beautiful yellow light floated gracefully above Olga's head. With a fast-beating heart I watched it from my resting place. It grew in size, and increased in height, gradually assuming the form of my darling, a complete counterpart of the one lying before me in the soft blue gown.

The face, the golden braids, the fingers, and the wedding ring were all there, completed by a smile so heavenly that I gazed as one transfixed.

Could this, then, be Olga, and not a stray beam of light which had struggled through the curtains?

"Olga!" I cried, stretching out my arms toward her in an ecstasy of gladness.

"Dear Victor! Have no fear. I will come again." The voice seemed like Olga's and as full of love as ever.

With that the beautiful yellow light began slowly to fade, the form of my beloved melted into a haze which drifted gradually upward and out of sight. Then I awoke.

Weeks passed, during which the fall rains set in, and I was working as hard as ever; not so much in a feverish desire for the gold I was taking out of the ground, but because the work helped me to forget my sorrow. I did not cease to think hourly of Olga, but I wished to put behind me the shock of her sudden leave-taking, and remember the fact that she was still in memory mine, that she was watching over me and would visit me in my dreams.

My all-absorbing love for her I could not—did not wish to put away from me. I had loved her so devotedly that I envied the passing breeze which played among the loose locks of the hair on her forehead. I had envied the dust of the road as it clung to her feet because it could remain so near to her; and I longed to become the atmosphere she breathed, that I

might live a part of her very physical being This sort of love never dies, because it is part of one's constitution and sub-consciousness, and cannot be eradicated.

I grew more and more silent. I was physically well and strong, but looked forward from morning until night to going home to my cabin and Olga. Each evening when my lonely supper had been eaten I turned the key of the adjoining cabin door, and carefully locked it behind me. From the outer place I entered the room which was now a sacred spot. A solitary candle gave all the light required. Lifting the section of flooring upon which had been placed two strong hinges, a few turns of the mechanical contrivance brought up from below the narrow bed in which the earthly form of Olga rested, securely covered by clear and heavy glass.

In my low, lounging chair I sat for hours beside her, told her of my love which would remain forever the same; I reminded her of her pledges of constancy, reviving instances of our past lives, even bringing to my mind bright bits of pleasantry which had been habitual to her while here.

At times I placed my cheek upon the icy

glass as near hers as possible, whispering words of love—always my great love, which like a deep and flowing well refused to be stopped.

At last one evening I leaned back in my easy chair much wearied, and because of the stillness, soon slept.

Ah! She had come again! In the brightest and purest yellow light she stood there bending toward me with a radiant and happy smile upon her face.

"Victor," she said, softly, "don't worry so much, dear, you will make yourself ill. Believe me you will soon cease to do this for you will know the better way and find real happiness. I know that this trial has been very hard indeed for you to bear, but you must not grieve longer," then I seemed to feel the light pressure of her hand upon my head.

Oh, the joy of it all once more!

"Tell me, Olga, do you still love me as well as before you went away?"

"Victor, dear Victor, believe me, I love you far better than ever before, because I understand. Try to be happy, dear." Then, with a light caress, she vanished.

For a moment I felt dazed. I looked about

me. The lighted candle was sputtering itself out in its socket, fitfully darting a thin and feeble flame upward into the darkness. My mouth was parched and dry—I must have water.

Carefully I lowered the blue-robed form to its resting place, adjusting the cover, locked the door behind me, and crept back into my own cabin.

Time passed. With a young lover's regularity at the side of his sweetheart I visited my dear one in the little cabin beside my own. Casting about in my mind how to make the place appropriate for the purpose for which it was now used, and at the same time be somewhat more comfortable, I had covered the walls of Olga's cabin both inside and out with a heavy black paper, well calculated to keep out the wind. Upon the ceiling of the front room hung silvered stars which shone brightly, and with a fitfulness not all unnatural in the flickering candlelight. In one corner of the outer room there still remained the heap of earth and gravel taken from the spot where Olga's body now rested. The rainy season was far advanced and before many days the snow and ice would be here

for long and weary months. My mining would then be over until another summer. I had been successful beyond my dreaming and could afford to rest, but I dreaded the tediousness and loneliness of winter.

One evening, while dozing in the depths of the easy chair, I saw a form bending above the sand and gravel in the next room. I fancied I heard a pleased and gentle laugh like Olga's of old, and I asked timidly, "What is it, friend?"

"Here is gold. Will you pan out this sand and gravel? You will be repaid." And again I heard the gentle laugh.

"What," said I in astonishment, "will I there find gold?"

A gesture of assent was given.

"Then this cabin and others must stand upon rich, gold-bearing ground?"

A second gesture of assent.

With that I wakened. I immediately procured a gold pan from my cabin, and used it for a few hours to good advantage.

The ground was truly rich; and Olga's form was lying in a bed literally lined with gold. There was wheat gold as well as dust and small nuggets. In my agony of mind at

her sudden death it had never occurred to me while digging that the gravel might contain anything of value; but it was plain to me now. Only for my dream I would surely have shovelled the sand thoughtlessly outside where someone might have made the discovery to my own loss.

Not long afterward a strange incident occurred. It happened in the following way. It was raining and past midnight, being one of the last rainstorms before the regular freeze-up it was proving to us there was no shortage of water in the clouds which seemed wide open, and it was pouring in torrents. For four hours I had been using the pick and shovel in the frozen gravel under the adjoining cabin, and had finally gone to sleep, lulled by the patter of the regularly falling rain upon the roof.

Suddenly I was aroused with a fear of—I knew not what. I instantly sprang from my bed, striking a match, and getting into my clothing as rapidly as possible, I made my way through the storm into the next cabin. It was then but a moment's work to lift Olga's casket to the floor from its icy bed beneath. As I did so a small stream of water burst its

way through below the flooring and began pouring over the side of the excavation, at the bottom of which only a moment before had rested Olga's casket.

Like a flash I understood the situation. The small trench around the cabin had filled with water and become obstructed, while the heavy rain had saturated the surface of the ground swelling the little stream beyond the capacity of its bank. I immediately ran out of doors to make a search for the obstruction, which, once removed, allowed the water to pass away as before. A small clump of grass and sticks had found lodgment, having been swept there by the unusual amount of falling rain, and in less time than it takes to write it, the mortal remains of my darling would have been flooded, had it not been for the warning and my prompt response. To clean out the small amount of water which had entered while I hastily worked at the trench was short work and soon completed.

With these and other incidents was my life henceforth made up. For months I spent several hours each day with pick or shovel in my hands. I bought the adjoining cabins with the lots upon which they stood, thereby con-

tinuing my work of thoroughly prospecting the ground, even after finishing that upon which Olga's house stood.

Following my practice of working during the midnight hour when most people were asleep, the indistinct noise of my pick in the frozen gravel below the floors aroused no one; though I once overheard two belated pedestrians outside my door wondering from what quarter the noise of the picking and shoveling came. No light was allowed to betray my whereabouts, as a single tallow candle placed low in my prospect hole beneath the floor told no tales; and once hearing the sound of voices in the street my labors instantly ceased.

After a few weeks it was whispered about the camp that strange noises proceeded from the mysterious black cabin at midnight, and later that the same uncanny sounds seemed further away. Only a few persons had ever heard them, and they assured their friends that the vicinity was a good one to keep away from at night time; the latter advice pleasing me quite as well as it did them.

For this reason I was never disturbed; and if more and more left to myself by my neighbors I was not displeased, as it suited my

frame of mind best to be alone with my own thoughts—and Olga.

Many months now passed. My life was a very quiet one, the most enjoyable hours to me being the ones spent in dreaming of Olga. Gradually the fact dawned upon me that my life was now a most selfish one. I was feeding upon memories of dear, by-gone days, but allowing the present to slip unimproved away. If I could arouse myself to some good purpose in life, and take a hand at scattering bright bits of happiness to console some lonely hearts who had less of comfort than myself, might it not be better? With the wealth which I had rapidly accumulated in Alaska, I could assist in much good work for the poor and needy if I were so inclined.

Perhaps I would find more happiness and contentment in living henceforth unselfishly, with more thought for others and less for myself.

Many times during the long winter evenings I had felt twinges of conscience concerning my selfish mode of life, well knowing that Olga would enjoy spending our wealth for the good and happiness of others before accepting luxuries for herself. Now I had come

to feel in the same way, and no longer craved riches or that which they would bring. My own wants were simple, and would continue to be so. I would make others happier. The helpless, homeless and suffering, I would relieve. My wealth would now permit it.

In this manner, and by my dreaming, my sorrow had been somewhat mitigated, and that grief, so terrible in the beginning, was to some extent assuaged. Not that I loved Olga less, or had forgotten, but all unknowingly I had been striving to be more worthy of her memory.

Daily I meditated in the sweet silence, and hourly received strength and consolation therefrom. Many pledges I made which I would fulfil later on—the future then held no terrors for me—I would work, work and wait. More, I would learn, I would grow, I would climb. I resolved to reach those heights to which many were traveling, and to which Olga had already surely attained. In due time, my Olga, we shall no doubt meet again and live, love and work together as of old, only that our happiness will be farther perfected because we have farther advanced.

. . . . . .

It was midnight. I seemed to visit the land of Holy Dreams. In the distance I heard a chorus of voices, exquisitely beautiful and well modulated, coming nearer as I continued to listen. The singers were many, but so perfect was the rhythm and harmony that I dared not breathe for fear of losing some part of the beautiful song. Not only so, but the accompanying orchestra faithfully upheld and completed the symphony which rose and fell with crescendos and diminuendoes more glorious as the chorus pealed louder and nearer. I was listening in sheer delight and with each nerve tingling, when a dear familiar voice began in obligato, so clearly and sweetly that the tears sprang into my eyes—

"Have love; not love alone for one,
But man as man thy brother call,
And scatter like the circling sun
Thy charities on all."

CHAPTER IX

EYLLEN'S WATER WITCH

TWO women sat weaving baskets. They were not Aleut Indians, and barely escaped being Russians; but were of mixed blood so common on the Aleutian Islands.

The younger one broke the silence.

"I'm tired of baskets! I want to do something else," she said, with a yawn.

"Run out upon the hills awhile, but first finish the row you are doing, then put all away in a safe place. No Russian leaves her work scattered to get lost or soiled," said the older woman.

"Am I a Russian lady?" queried the girl, apparently about the age of eighteen.

"You may be if your father comes to take you to Russia with him. But by this time he is likely dead;—there is no telling. It is three years since we saw him, and he promised to come again in two." And the woman sighed.

"Oh, he may come at any time, and I am going to the top of the hill to look for him now," said the girl with youth's hopefulness, as she hastened to obey her aunt.

"Don't set your mind on it, for sailor men are very uncertain; only they are pretty sure to roll around the whole world, making excuses that ships take them whether they will or not. A poor excuse for not coming is better than none." Then as the door closed behind the girl she added, "I wish he would send money to buy her clothes; it would be as little as he could do, for she is not my child, but my sister's. I, too, wish he would come, for a cold winter we have had taking much coal and many furs, and my money is nearly gone. To be sure when the steamers come with their hundreds of people bound for the gold fields we shall sell some of our baskets, but it will be weeks before they arrive," and she pulled industriously at the long strands of dried grass she was weaving into her basket.

While her aunt meditated on these and various other matters the girl, Eyllen, glad to get away from the cabin and basket-making, crossed the foot bridge over the small

stream which ran behind the house and began to ascend the high bluff which she claimed as her watch tower. If she could only discern her father's ship in the distance, how surprised her aunt would be!

On the islands the winter was over. The month of May had come with its many attendant delights. Snow had gone from the ground in the little settlements and lay only upon the high hills and great mountain tops surrounding. Down gulches and canyons flowed swift, icy streams of what had until lately been great snow masses, but which on melting had left bare the sides of the tundra-covered hills where the brightest of wild flowers were beginning to spring into beauty.

The girl was not blind to their loveliness. Upon leaving the cabin she had determined to bring back all she could carry of the blossoms, but not until she had well scanned the horizon for ships. Her father might even now be approaching the islands, and perhaps he could see her through his glass. With this thought in mind she pulled her handkerchief from her pocket and waved it enthusiastically, although as yet no ship had she seen. Seeing some little children far

She scanned the horizon

below in the village playing near the priest's school she laughed aloud.

"They will surely say I am bewitched if they see me, and what a joke that would be! I am certain to be badly quizzed by the youngsters when I get home, for there is no such luck as to escape their sharp eyes while standing upon this hill-top. It will be a wonder if some of them do not follow me. If they do, they will not find me," and she laughed again as she hastened on over the brow of the bluff.

Eyllen was lithe of limb and supple. To mountain climbing she had been accustomed since a baby, and was well and hardy. She now stood for a moment to take a fresh survey of the bay. A slight breeze was blowing, and had tinted her smooth round cheeks with crimson. Her eyes sparkled, and her whole face betokened earnest and animated thought. Down her back hung two thick braids of dark hair, but the ends had become free, and, left unconfined, floated picturesquely about her shoulders.

An Aleut Indian she surely was not. She had not their short, dumpy stature, but was slender and graceful, and would not have

seemed out of place in civilization.

Having satisfied herself that no vessel could put into the harbor for some hours, if at all that day, she strolled farther on. Down one hill and up another, picking a flower here and one there, humming as she went some old Russian song, her time passed in evident enjoyment though with more or less abstraction.

"I will visit that spot again, and find out what there is so strange and uncanny about it," she murmured. "I am not afraid, for nothing can harm me. It is said that a woman has much curiosity, and I am a woman, so that will allow me to inquire into the mystery, for mystery it surely is. Why should I be so strangely affected when visiting that spot? Why these sudden head pains, and dizziness as though I were about to fall to the ground? Can it be that some witch or evil spirit dwells there and is displeased with my coming? Does it belong to them any more than to me? Have I not the right to come and sit beside the little stream as often as I choose? I will inquire into the matter this very day, and solve the puzzle, for I will never rest until I do."

So saying, she hurried her steps and was finally standing at the head of a small stream, where, from between rocks, the water came bubbling to the surface and trickled away to lower ground. She was thirsty from her long walk and climbing in the sunshine, and stooped to fill a drinking cup she had brought with her for the purpose.

Suddenly she was seized with dizziness, then an electric thrill or trembling passed through her whole body, and a wave of faintness swept over her. She felt ill.

Her face grew very pale.

Was it the work of one of the witches she had heard so many times about?

At that she ran away a little distance and sat down upon a grassy knoll. She had not yet quenched her thirst, and longed for the water. There was no other spring near at hand, and she was determined to have a cupful from that one. The witch, she thought, (if a witch's work it was) had not done worse with her than cause the sudden illness and disagreeable sensations, and she would repeat her visit to the spring and secure a cupful of the water; which, though possibly bewitched, still looked as pure and

sparkling as that of her own bright mountain stream near home.

When she had fully recovered, she again advanced toward the spring. Not until she stood above its waters and peered into their shallow depths did the old and oddly unpleasant experience repeat itself. Exactly as before it happened now; but the girl, always a determined and resolute creature, secured the water as she had intended, and retreated to her hillock where she again seated herself before tasting the liquid.

A second time the trembling left her, not so quickly as before, perhaps, yet still in a very few moments she was again herself.

Gingerly she sipped the water. It tasted clean, sweet, and deliciously cool. Again she cautiously sipped. Still no evil effects from the draught. Thus encouraged, she drained the cup, laughing aloud as she did so.

"Ha, ha! old water witch of the mountains! I am neither afraid of you nor your twin brother, the wind wizard. I am light, love and happiness, and you cannot harm me."

Saying this she began braiding her long

hair with which the breezes had played so mischievously during her rambles, and growing more serious she reflected on the phenomenon.

"It is in the rocks or ground underneath the spring, and not in the water. Surely I have proved that. Before today have I visited this place, and it is always the same. I will tell no one, else the priest may say I am bewitched, and make me do severe penance. Only once more will I approach the spring today and then I must surely go home or I will lose my supper."

She was the lodestone, being irresistably drawn to the magnet, which was apparently the rocks at the fountain.

As before she approached, but with less trepidation. She began to lose all fear. Some inner monitor urged fearlessness, and she felt full of courage.

As she stooped low above the spring, surrounded on all sides as it was by ledges of rocks and boulders, she determined to hold herself, notwithstanding the decidedly disagreeable sensations it gave her, firmly in position long enough to get a view of the bottom of the spring. It was not a deep pool,

forming a mirror for all above it, but rather a bed of loose rocks, evidently from crumbled ledges. These latter, crossed the place from east to west, but to the careless glance of Eyllen, seemed simply a confused jumble of rocks and nothing more.

Several of these pieces were light and clear. They looked attractive in contrast to darker ones, and being washed clean by the water, and made brighter by the sunshine, tempted the young girl to reach for them, which she did.

"See! What was that?"

The rock was filled with shining yellow specks which shone dazzlingly in the sunbeams.

The girl gazed in astonishment upon them.

"Holy Mother Mary!" she ejaculated. "How beautiful! I believe its gold!"

With that she made a dash for other bits of the same rock, and though her head ached fearfully, and it seemed to her that she stood upon an electric battery, which was anything but pleasant, she secured as much as she could carry, and fled as before from the spot.

"Holy Mother Mary!" she ejaculated.
"How beautiful! I believe its gold!"

Upon examination it proved to be the same as the first piece discovered.

Crossing herself devoutly she murmured a prayer. That over she kissed the fragments of quartz in her hand, talking lovingly to them in the meantime.

"Why did you hide away from me so long? Why cause me to think of witches, but force me to come to you once and again, and giving me the illness? That's a funny way, you little rascals! And I will now repay you by hiding you yet longer from sight of any who might come here. I will cover you carefully until I come again, or until my father comes from across the ocean. Then I will give you to him, and he shall find the rest of your brothers and sisters." She pulled energetically at the moss and grass at her side in order to make a hiding spot for her newly discovered friends, as she chose to consider them.

Before putting the last piece beside the others she again kissed it tenderly, patted it, and giving a little gurgling laugh, said:

"You pretty darlings! Sleep quietly until I come again, and let nobody find you. See? I will tuck you up, head and heels,

with this cover," and she replaced the mosses and grass she had just pulled.

"By and by you can make me very happy if you will, when I can be a rich lady. I have heard old miners talk lovingly of you many times, but they shall not find you. You are mine! Remember, you are mine!"

With that she gave a last look at the spot where her secret was hidden, and bounded away down the hillside.

Presently in the valley below she struck an old trail,—one made long ago by the cattle belonging to the settlement, and the occasional tread, perhaps, of a few reindeer and goats owned by the mission priest.

Hurrying along toward home she had almost forgotten the flowers she had intended to gather but now had little time to leave the trail and pluck them. For the sake of appearance, however, she pulled those happening to grow alongside her path, not wishing to reach home empty handed.

As it was, her aunt's sharp eyes took notice.

"To be gone so long upon the hills, and yet bring so few blossoms? You must be slow in bending your back or heedless of the

beauty around you. Where are the buttercups and beautiful blue iris from the field below the hill? Was the upper bridge gone that you could not cross the stream at that place either going or coming?" asked the woman, a little sarcastically.

"No, no, Aunt, but it is early for iris, and the buttercups are not half so lovely as these bluets and violets. See the darling little blue eyes peeping at us! Tomorrow I will look for the iris. But let me eat my supper now, for I am very hungry," laughed Eyllen, after she had placed her spring beauties in water.

"When we played by the schoolyard," remarked her youngster cousin dryly, from between huge mouthfuls of fish and potato, "she was standing on the high hilltop and looking out to sea. I am certain I saw her wave something to the sailors, only there were no sailors there," and the urchin glanced roguishly across the table at Eyllen.

"Ha, you rogue! It was likely the corner of my apron you saw, if indeed your sight was clear enough to see me at all so far away. I wonder Father Peter allows you to let go your fancy in such manner."

"Father Peter wishes us to learn by seeing, he tells us. Besides I wondered how you thought to pluck flowers on that barren hilltop where the snow is hardly yet melted. Warm and sunny hillsides are the spots where spring flowers grow."

"There, there," said the boy's mother, "you talk far too much. Eat your supper and let your elders alone."

The boy shrugged his shoulders and gulped down his tea, having finished his tea before the others owing to his haste in beginning.

The older woman then gravely inquired if any ships had that day been seen.

None could be reported; and the youngster was soon in a state of great sleepiness in bed, while the two women washed the supper dishes and made the small cabin once more tidy.

That night Eyllen slept little. On her cot in the corner she pondered long and earnestly. Just what was the nature of the strange phenomenon with which she was so lately identified she had no idea. She only knew that the mystical rocks lying embedded in that spring were full of life which thrilled

Father Peter

her tremendously as she made a near approach to them. As a magnet they had attracted her until finally she perceived what to her constituted discovery.

How very strange it was! Could it be possible that here were ledges containing much gold which no one had ever discovered, and which might all be her own if she could succeed in keeping her secret until her father should arrive? Of his coming she had not the least doubt, as had her aunt; she felt positive if he were dead she would in some way know it. It was springtime and the season for vessels to put into the harbor for coal and fresh water on their way to the Arctic Ocean; and they would bring him sometime she felt confident. Then he would be delighted to hear of his daughter's discovery, and together they would grow to be very rich indeed.

Eyllen was a sensible girl and a good reasoner, but her knowledge of minerals was exceedingly limited. Each piece of white rock was, to her, quartz; and the place where gold was found in any form was a mine, or would be one later when developed. She really wished to find out if there was more

of the same gold-bearing ore at the spring, for unless there were large masses of it she knew her discovery was worthless.

Then she thought of her often recurring and unpleasant sensations at the spring, and it occurred to her that here was a way by which to gain further knowledge. If she could bear the headaches and dizziness might she not, by this means, trace the hidden ledges? It seemed reasonable even to her inexperienced mind. But she would need to use considerable caution. None must see the gold-bearing rock which was already so fascinating to her. In some manner, she reasoned, she must find a way of gaining information about minerals other than by asking questions. Curiosity upon the subject would quickly give her friends the cue to her new interest. She decided to visit the library of Father Peter in his absence, and from his housekeeper borrow some book giving such information. By talking to the good woman about her home work and children she could manage to distract her attention so she would not notice which book it was she was taking.

In this way Eyllen planned for hours be-

fore sleeping. When she finally slept it was to dream of a beautiful water witch who lived in the bottom of the mountain spring between the rocks, but when, on insisting upon a nearer view she found it to be only herself with her dark hair floating around her, she laughed aloud, and so awakened. This decided her, however, upon one thing.

She would search for a tiny fragment of the beautiful rock containing as much of the precious mineral as possible, and wear it suspended about her neck underneath her dress; as this, according to tradition, would surely preserve the wearer from witchcraft. Not that she believed herself possessed of any spirit other than her own; but the strangeness of the sudden indisposition attacking her at the spring, added to her dream, caused her to greatly wonder.

A week passed. Eyllen developed a most remarkable passion for wild flowers, along with a sudden and vigorous distaste for basket-making. She declared the latter occupation gave her headache and loss of appetite, and only the fresh mountain air made her feel like herself again. In her aunt's cabin the window ledges were filled with

blossoms, and an overflow of the same was furnished the priest's housekeeper.

Then, too, a daily watch was kept for ships from the westward by the girl whose strong limbs served her well in mountain climbing. As the sun grew warmer and clearer above the islands, she could see old "Round Top" begin to breathe. At times this mountain's snowy head became quite hidden in the obscurity of misty vapor or smoke clouds, while the double peak of Isanotski, rising as grandly as ever to its height above the others, seemed, by its longer-retained snow cap, to assure the world of its superiority.

Frequently, but cautiously, she rambled among the hills. Patiently she investigated the rocks upon the hillside, quickly learning where she might venture to be free from the sudden indisposition, and where it was sure to attack her; for there appeared no cessation of the phenomenon. With the hammer which she secretly fetched from home she hacked the out-cropping lode in different directions. Everywhere in the white rocks there were the golden specks scintillating in the sunshine. It was a bona fide gold-bear-

ing ledge. From the borrowed book she gained much knowledge that was helpful, but with this more and more she felt her powerlessness to proceed or to turn her newly found interest to good account.

More than ever she longed to see her father. Between her walks to the spring on the hillside she climbed the bluff and continued to look for ships from the westward. To be sure other vessels were beginning to arrive, and to welcome them the whole settlement habitually turned out upon the wharf. There were empty water tanks refilled, repairs made, and larders replenished, while ship's officers drank, smoked, and told sea yarns in the saloons along the water front.

Thus passed weeks of waiting to Eyllen and her aunt. It seemed that the monotony would never end; but it did end suddenly at last.

One day as the two women sat busily at work upon their baskets the youngster of the family rushed in quite breathless.

"A ship's in sight which flies the Russian flag! She's nearing the harbor now! Some men with glasses on the bluff have sighted

her, and signalled to those below! She may be coming from Vladivostock and bring news of my uncle!" and the lad dashed out of the cabin and down again upon the wharf.

"Or, better yet, the ship may bring him!" suggested Eyllen, in a flutter, hastily rising and putting away her work. "I must see if my father has really come."

"I trust it is so; then will my prayers not be in vain. If he brings money again will they be answered," said the girl's relative.

"If he brings no gold his daughter will be glad to see him," said Eyllen in a slightly offended tone.

"I meant no harm, Eyllen. You surely understand me. Has not your father been always welcome here?"

"Yes, yes, Aunt," and tears forced their way out of her eyes, as the girl threw her shawl about her. "But come, we will soon find out about this vessel, and who is on board."

The ship was now moving into the placid bay and toward the shore. From a flag staff the Russian emblem already fluttered a welcome to the visiting craft. To be sure, the shore flag was accompanied by one made

up of stars and stripes, and this last floated proudly at top of the mast above the other, but the two flags seemed not to be on unfriendly terms.

At last the vessel swung alongside the dock. Eagerly did Eyllen and her aunt, standing among the group of natives, scan the faces of those on the vessel. None were familiar, and they were about to turn disappointed away when they heard a shout.

Some one on deck motioned to the two women to come to the ship's side, and they hurriedly obeyed, scarcely knowing what they did.

"Were you looking for someone?" kindly inquired an officer in Russian.

"My father," replied the girl, disappointedly. "But he cannot be on board your ship or he would have been out to greet us."

"Your father's name?" asked the officer.

"Fedor Michaelovitz," responded Eyllen.

"He is on board, but he is ill. We will fetch him ashore presently," but even as he spoke two men passed through the door to the gangplank. They carried a litter between them upon which lay stretched a man.

Eyllen rushed toward the litter. It was

really her father, but so changed that she would not have recognized him.

According to the physician's orders Fedor Michaelovitz was placed in the small hospital established upon the islands for sailors, and there he was well tended. In a few days he was far enough recovered to relate to his daughter his story.

After leaving her three years before and meeting many vicissitudes and disappointments, he had at last gained a fairly good position, when smallpox overtook him, and during a long illness he had lost it. Recovering and working his way up again elsewhere, he had lived frugally in order to save a competence upon which to live with his daughter in their own country to which he wished to take her.

When his wishes seemed about to be realized the bank in which his money had been placed, failed, and he lost all his hard earned savings. Weakened by discouragement he again fell ill, and then he decided to sail for the Aleutians and see his daughter at all hazards. Penniless, ill, and discouraged, he was a man who, in middle life, had still nothing to show for years of work and hard-

ships.

One redeeming feature of all this dark outlook, there was with him a friend who was apparently moved by the misfortunes of Michaelovitz, and that was a young Russian sailor with whom he had become acquainted some years before, and who followed him wherever he went, even at the risk of causing a corresponding failure in his own affairs by so doing.

The young man's name was Shismakoff, and he had proven himself not only kindly and generous, but self-sacrificing and noble. Along with these good and somewhat unusual qualities, he possessed more than average good looks and abundant patience. He it was who now in the hospital faithfully attended Michaelovitz, as was his habit.

This young man had been told but little of the family history of his friend, only knowing that his wife was dead and that a daughter lived upon the Aleutians with her aunt.

This much he knew upon landing. At sight of Eyllen's bright eyes and rosy cheeks the young man's heart fluttered. She was good to look upon. Without commenting

upon it even to himself he immediately proceeded to take, as compensation for attentions to her sick father, such keen enjoyment in her presence as only those long isolated can know in the society of ladies. Not that he forgot his manliness. For that the young man was too sensible; but he simply drank in every word uttered by the young girl, as a thirsty traveler would drink fresh water in a parched and burning desert.

The girl, herself, was unconstrained. Probably in this lay her greatest attraction. She had other hopes and interests, and they were centered in her father's recovery, and in her rocks a few miles away on the hillside.

Eyllen did not immediately relate her adventures to her father. He must recover his health before she disclosed her secret. To this end she now bent all her energies. A basket was traded to a neighbor for fowls in order that he might have nourishing broths, and her fishing tackle was brought into play to furnish the freshest of fish from the bay.

With attendants like Eyllen and Shismakoff, who could long remain upon a sick bed?

Especially on these beautiful green islands in spring-time? Greatest of all grasses were those growing before the doors, and brightest of all blossoms were those plucked by the hands of Eyllen. Sweet was the fragrance of iris and violets, and lupins grew straight stalked and fearless. Lilies, too, appeared later, and all crowded the windows of the invalid whose heart was gladdened, softened, and refreshed by their sweet and silent influence.

At her basket work Eyllen sat daily for hours with her father, until he was strong enough to walk to her relative's cabin. Of course it was only to be expected that Shismakoff would accompany them. Upon one side of the convalescent he furnished support, while Eyllen assisted on the other.

The girl's aunt had prepared a dinner especially for the visitors, at which the incorrigible youngster had been instructed to appear only when his elders had finished. It was Saturday, and the priest's school was not in session that day. Freedom from this restraint had had its effect upon the urchin, and his mother found it in her heart to frequently wish that it had been a school day in-

stead. With care she instructed him in what manner to behave himself, and what things he must under no consideration do, one of which was not to talk too much.

"In that case, mother, what I do say must count," said the boy, not dull as to wit.

"Count fifty before you speak at all. Then you must consider what you say, and you will not be foolish. I daresay you will still show yourself feather-headed enough," and his mother sighed, apparently striving to be resigned to the suspense of her position.

The visitors were telling of their recent voyage to the islands. The youngster could keep quiet no longer.

"Eyllen has been long expecting you, Mr. Shismakoff. She often went to the hilltop to wave to you, and I suppose she also called you. Did you hear her across the water, and come in answer?"

The young man smiled.

"Be silent! you naughty boy!" commanded his mother, with as much force as she could master.

Eyllen's color grew like the wild roses in the window.

"Did you hear her calling?" persisted the

mischief loving youngster.

"I do not think so. I take it the saints directed me here, for none but they could bring me this present happiness," said the visitor, gallantly inclining his head to the one with the roses in her cheeks.

At this point Eyllen's father began to speak of other things, and the irrepressible youngster subsided; while Eyllen and her aunt looked modestly down upon the plates before them.

Two weeks passed. The ship which brought the sick man and his friend had departed, leaving them behind. None were sad at its going. Eyllen's father was rapidly improving, and gradually grew to feel that life was, after all, worth having. To the younger man, each hour in the presence of Eyllen seemed brighter even than the one before it, and a longing for many of the same in the future took possession of him. There was no real enjoyment out of her sight. His former existence looked to him a blank. He could not go back to it. He could not leave this green island, the clear mountain air made salt by great encircling waters and scented by spring blossoms.

There were no fish like those in these waters, and no winds so free as the ones playing over the crests of Progromni and Shishaldin. Finally, nowhere in the whole world was an equal to Eyllen among women.

This last consideration settled everything. He was determined to win her in marriage if possible, but her father no longer needed attention, and he bethought himself to set to work at something by which to earn money. More fishermen were in demand at this time in the settlement to supply the constantly arriving ships with fresh fish, and he devoted himself temporarily to this labor.

In her turn Eyllen was interested in Shismakoff, but she longed to disclose her secret to her father, who, she felt confident, could not refrain from sharing it with his friend. To this she could not yet consent. She had suddenly grown wise with a wisdom not before exhibited. If the young man loved her as she felt that he did, might not the knowledge of her secret urge him to increase his attention? In all probability it would, and she heartily repudiated this idea.

Of all things in the world, to be loved for

her gold-bearing ledges would be the worst of misfortunes, she reflected, and this feeling, growing upon her, prevented her day after day from confiding in her father. When he had recovered his strength sufficiently to walk among the hills (she told herself) then she would inform him of her good fortune; and even then he must be pledged to keep his own counsel.

At last the time came; the girl invited her father to walk with her upon the hills to gather wild flowers.

"We will go first into the valley by way of the trail, Father, and then come home another way. There are many beautiful blossoms and mosses, and we will take our tin cup and lunch along with us," said Eyllen brightly as she made ready for the tramp.

"Anywhere you say, Eyllen, only let it not be too far for my feet to travel," replied the man indulgently, as he watched her, well pleased with the grace of her movements.

"When we are tired we will sit and rest in the sunshine. See! Here is buttermilk the priest's housekeeper has sent you. I will carry a bottleful to refresh you when thirsty.

They then trudged off among the hills. A few short walks Michaelovitz had already taken with his friend and good supporter at his arm, but who was today away in his boat on the water, and he now leaned upon the stock he carried in his right hand.

For a time Eyllen walked by her father's side, carrying her basket of luncheon, but as the trail narrowed she led the way, restraining her haste as best she could (for she was impatient to be at her ledges) lest she should tire her father before their walk was ended.

Several times they halted to rest. As yet her father saw no reason for hurrying. To loiter, to rest upon the hillside and chat in the sunshine was what he liked; and here was his daughter fleet-footed and strong, almost hurriedly leading him far into the valley between the hills as though bent on some mission.

Where could she be going?

"Are you sure you know where you go, daughter? And that you will not get us lost in the mountains? I have never before been so far from the settlement in this direction, and we cannot hear the church bell ring, eh, Eyllen?"

"No, Father, we care nothing for hearing the church bells now," laughed the girl, "and as for losing ourselves, it is impossible, as I have many times rambled over and through these hills. I know each rock as large as my head, and I will show you some presently much larger and more beautiful, as you are sure to agree with me."

"Rocks are not beautiful, child. I thought it was blossoms you wanted to show me."

"So it is, but on our return. We have reached the place I wanted to show you, Father. Sit upon this mound while I fetch a cup of water from the spring," and the girl ran a few steps farther.

Returning with the water she said briskly, "now we will eat our lunch while we rest and talk, for I have a little story to tell you in the meantime," and the hands at the basket trembled a trifle.

A cloth was spread upon the ground, and the basket's contents turned out upon it. There was the bottle of buttermilk which Eyllen declared she would not carry home again, as it might be changed into butter by that time, and she urged her father to drink it and eat heartily.

"But the story, Eyllen, the story! What is it you will tell me? I doubt not 'tis some island-lover business, or a new gown you will politely ask for when your father's appetite is quieted, as is the way of many keen women, eh, little girl?" said Michaelovitz giving his daughter's pink right ear a gentle tweak.

"There is neither new gown nor lover in it, and you will never guess, so I am going directly to tell you," smiled Eyllen. "Do you see this piece of pretty rock, Father?"

"There you go again with calling rocks pretty. But stay! What is this, child?" Where did you get it? Is there more? Do you know what it is that sparkles?" questioned the man rapidly, bending forward toward his daughter.

"Yes, Father, it is gold, and there is much more of it where that comes from. I have found the ledges."

"You, child? You? How did it happen? Tell me."

Then the girl proceeded to relate her experience with which we are already familiar; how she first came to drink at the spring, and her peculiar sensations which were at

first affrighting; how she persisted in returning to the place until by accident she discovered the quartz pieces in the water; her foolish fears of a water witch, including her dream, and her decision to wear as a talisman a bit of the gold besprinkled rock; of her hesitating in telling her father her secret for fear he would divulge it to his companion, young Shismakoff, at the same time entreating her listener to keep sacred her confidence for fear that others would molest the treasure-laden ledges; and lastly, inquiring if he would, as her partner, accept one half of the property as a present.

"May the blessed saints preserve us! my child, what is this you are saying? Where are the ledges? Where are they?" and the man sprang to his feet in excited interest. At that, the buttermilk flask rolled away down the hillside where it landed against the stones below, breaking into hundreds of flying fragments. The lunch basket, too, toppled over, with the contents, luckily being only sandwiches of bread and butter; and Eyllen, as excited now as her father, ran lightly down the path to the spring from which she had filled her drinking cup a few

minutes earlier.

"Here are the ledges, Father, here they are! Come and see for yourself!" pointing to the rocks she had already so thoroughly investigated.

The man quickly followed. He was weak and weary no longer. His walking stick lay neglected on the ground beside the luncheon, and he had forgotten that weariness or hunger were possible. Eagerly he examined the formation, the quartz, the wall rocks and surroundings, ejaculating and questioning Eyllen in the meantime.

She replied that she was positive no one knew of her interest in the hillside, as she had carefully kept concealed her destination when walking so frequently here. All prospecting had been done by herself, and now she would gladly share the work, worry, and profits with him, she laughingly avowed.

Only one condition would she rigidly impose, and that was that Shismakoff should be kept in ignorance of their good fortune as long as was possible.

At this her father arose from his stooping position among the rocks and looked keenly at Eyllen.

"You mistake if you think that Shismakoff is unable to keep a secret," said he earnestly. Then seeing Eyllen's blushing and downcast countenance, the facts began to take shape in his brain.

"Oh, ho! I see it! Is that your meaning? My wit is not the keenest, else I would sooner have caught it. Well, well, child, perhaps you are right, although I shall sorely want his counsel and advice in this matter. I promise to withhold the knowledge of these ledges from him until I have your permission to tell it; so rest easy, and fret not. He is a good fellow, and I fancy will presently remove the necessity for further secrecy by making known his intentions to your father. With your acceptance of his hand there need be only confidence between us."

As he finished speaking, a wave of sentiment passed over him, and his eyes filled with tears. Approaching his daughter, he took her hand in his own, drew her closer to him and kissed her. "You are a good child, Eyllen, and very like your mother. It is a pity she cannot be with us! You are worthy of a good husband, and he will be one. You

will have great happiness."

Resuming his examination of the rocks he dropped his seriousness and remarked in a lighter tone: "That he is a poor man is not important now that you will have riches yourself. Should both possess wealth it would be too much of good luck, and one fortune is quite sufficient."

Eyllen was now herself once more. Tilting her head backwards she measured the sun with her eyes.

"It is time we returned now, Father," she said, "for we will have flowers to gather by handfuls. There is no such thing for us as reaching home empty handed. It would never do. You see I have been much at this work, and know how to manage."

"Right you are, child, we will do so."

"Here is your walking stick, Father," holding it out to him.

"Bah! I do not need it! I am now strong."

"But, Father, please use the stick, because you must not be grown strong too rapidly. It may cause comment, and you must not excite suspicion of our good fortune, and why we came here today. Leave the stick

where you will tomorrow, but take it with you today." she urged laughingly, and with eyes twinkling.

"To be sure,—to be sure. I forgot. I will not expose your secret, child; have no fear."

With that they turned their faces toward home. Flowers nodded gaily on all sides, and soon replaced the luncheon in their basket.

Mosses, green and velvety, sank beneath the pressure of each foot-fall, and a brood of eaglets tested their pinions near the crag above the trail.

Right glad was Fedor Michaelovitz before reaching home that he had listened to Eyllen and carried his walking stick. Without its support he would have found much more tedious the long walk from the mountains.

A hot supper, a pipe full of tobacco and a restful evening, however, restored him, especially as Shismakoff made his appearance all spick and span after his day's work on the water. The recital of his adventures with a school of whale in mid-ocean, and the capture of one of them, occupied a good share of

the evening. Eyllen's father asked many questions relative to the subject. To these were supplemented the queries of the youngster, whose large dark eyes fairly stood out upon his cheeks with wonder at the tale. To say that the boy's admiration for Shismakoff was thereafter greatly augmented would be speaking much too mildly. From that day, the young man was looked upon by him as a hero who needed only a following of soldiers to make him a real general.

In this way the evening passed with slight reference to the tramp of Eyllen and her father in the mountains, much to the girl's satisfaction.

Her mind was now relieved. Work upon her baskets was again taken up, and perseveringly done. Michaelovitz, with walking stick in hand, tramped among the hills alone often, considering it the affair of no one that a pick and shovel did honest duty in his hands during the day, and lay secreted beneath the rocks near the little spring when he returned to his cabin at night-fall. If his capacious coat pockets contained bread slices in the morning, it was empty by evening, and his hands full of blossoms then quickly paci-

fied the children he met in the village.

At times Eyllen accompanied her father. Then, at his direction, by the use of her mysterious instinct for minerals, she could trace still further the treasure-filled ledges from the spring or ore shute where her initial discovery had been made. By this means, several hundred feet of gold-bearing ledges were located and staked by the girl and her father, whose active labor in the open air, along with a brightened future and more encouraging life prospects, soon caused the man to grow strong and well again. Shismakoff and Eyllen became more fond of each other day by day, until at last it was beyond his patience to endure uncertainty longer, and he told her of his great love, begging for a response in the form of a promise of marriage. To this the girl replied as he desired, taking no note of his reference to a lack of exchequer, and that he must go away from the islands in order to make money more rapidly.

A few days afterwards, Michaelovitz invited the young man to join himself and daughter in a ramble to the hills. Eyllen thought it was no harm to give the whales

and fishes one day more of freedom, she said, and his boat needed caulking. She insisted that the boat must be made entirely seaworthy, now that it must carry her future husband; and she could not endure the thought of his life being in danger.

Upon reaching the vicinity of the spring in the ledges, Michaelovitz proposed that they rest for a little and listen to a story which Eyllen had to relate to them, but (with a woman's usual perverseness) when they were comfortably seated upon the grass she refused to begin it. Would she finish if her father began it? they asked.

No, she would not even promise to finish. If her father wished the story to be told, then he must tell it, she declared between laughing and blushing.

The old man needed no urging. He proceeded to relate the story of the discovery of her gold ledges. Of her patiently locating the ledges in the face of the fact that her strange electric instinct for minerals gave her real suffering; and of her taking him into her secret; not omitting to tell of the water witch, the talisman, and the dream, as well as her wish that Shismakoff be kept in

ignorance to the last moment. It was now that Michaelovitz forced his daughter to regret that she had not herself told the tale.

He did not spare her blushes. On the contrary he bore down upon the finale of the narrative with all the vigor of a surgeon performing a serious duty, adding that she had had her wishes in the matter gratified, and she ought to be satisfied that their listener was a genuine lover, and not one seeking a wife for her possessions.

At this juncture Eyllen's poor cheeks could blush no longer. Her eyes were wet, but her lips were smiling; and Michaelovitz betook himself to the path which led to the spring, thus giving the lovers an opportunity to be alone.

Shismakoff was the first to speak.

"So this is the little one who wears the talisman!" he laughed. "But it has no power to protect you from witchcraft, as I can honestly testify. See! Here in me is the proof of my story. Have you not bewitched *me?*" his strong arms moving tenderly around the girl's little jacket, while he covered her lips with kisses.

"Give the talisman to me, darling, that I

may wear it until your love shall be as strong for me as is my own for Eyllen!"

Then the girl, thinking him in earnest, handed it to her lover who hung it about his neck beneath his waistcoat next to his heart. So the lovers had forgotten the ledges and the man among them, and thought only of their love and each other; the rocks, gold-laden though they were, as well as everything else, being then of secondary importance.

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